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To What Extent is There a Relationship Between Middle Grades Educator Stressors and Phases of the Career Teacher?

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Letter of Transmittal

TO WHAT EXTENT IS THERE A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MIDDLE GRADES EDUCATOR STRESSORS AND PHASES OF THE CAREER TEACHER?

By

Jessica Joy Morris

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of
Columbus State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

in Curriculum and Leadership

Columbus State University

Columbus, GA

July 2017

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by

Dedication

For my family. Your steadfast belief in my abilities has given me an opportunity to be

stronger, smarter and braver than I ever thought possible.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this dissertation would have not been possible without the support

and love of my family. Tim, your generosity is overwhelming. It is remarkable how far

you are willing to go when someone believes in you. Kelsey, words simply cannot

describe the way in which your friendship and listening ear have guided and encouraged me. Everyone should have the opportunity to go on this journey with a sister. Sadie and Sally, I strive to make you proud, thank you for understanding when mommy had to do her "schoolwork". To my parents, thank you for always taking interest, supporting and loving me through all of my decisions. To Christopher Drake, the person to first tell me that I was a good teacher, thank you for helping me to believe in myself as a young professional. Again, it is astonishing how a few encouraging words can motivate someone to do their best.

This endeavor could not have been possible without my dissertation committee, Michael Richardson, Pamela Lemoine and Richard Rogers. I am truly indebted and have benefitted greatly from the mentoring of both my dissertation chair, Michael Richardson and Richard Rogers. I strive for the broad spectrum of knowledge and critical thinking analysis of Michael Richardson and the challenging yet kind demeanor of Richard Rogers that I have seen throughout this process. Pamela Lemoine, your helpfulness and challenging thoughts have been an immeasurable asset. Thank you all for your encouragement and steadfast belief that this was an attainable achievement for me.

Vita
JESSICA JOY MORRIS

<u>SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS</u>
- An enthusiastic educator who believes all children can learn in a stimulating and encouraging environment
- Specializations include: Middle Grades 4-8; Social Studies, English and Reading (ESOL and Reading endorsed)

PROFESSIONAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

ROBERT A. CROSS MIDDLE MAGNET SCHOOL   July 2008 – July 2015
Albany, GA

Middle Grades Social Studies Teacher

- Develop daily lesson plans and testing materials for the 7th grade Social Studies team; utilize technology to enhance instruction
- Implement classroom management techniques while maintaining student involvement and discipline
- Partner with parents in students' success; provide feedback on students' progress and discuss areas needing improvement and additional work

Awards and School Involvement

- RCMMS Teacher of the Year Award (2015)
- 7th grade Red Team Leader (2013-2015)
- Leadership Team Representative (2013-2015)
- Social Studies Chairperson for Robert A. Cross Middle Magnet School (2011-2015)
- 7th Grade Social Studies Chairperson (2011-2015)
- School Improvement Plan annual implementation committee (2008-2015)
- Honors Day Committee Co-Chairperson (2008-2015)
- New Teacher Mentor (2010-2012)
- Superintendents Incentive Award (greatest gains in academic improvement) (2009)
- 6th Grade Social Studies Chairperson (2008-2011)
- Beta Club Sponsor (2008-2011)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

7th grade Curriculum Assessment Writer	2014-2015 School Term
Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) Cohort	2013-2014 School Term
Classroom Instruction That Works Cohort	2011-2012 School Term

EDUCATION

B.A., Psychology, Asbury University, Wilmore, KY-2007

M.Ed., Reading, Language and Literacy (ESOL), Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA-2011

Ed.D. Curriculum and Leadership, Columbus State University, Columbus, GA-2017

ASSOCIATIONS & CERTIFICATIONS

T-5 Georgia Teacher Certification 4-8; Social Studies, ELA, Reading (ESOL and Reading endorsed)
Delta Kappa Gamma, Xi Chapter (2011-2015)
Phi Kappa Phi Honors Society (2015-present)

Abstract

The issue of teacher stress is an international area of concern. The primary means of

gathering this work-related stress data from educators however, has been quantitatively

with participants in elementary or secondary sectors, with little comparative data

recorded for middle grades teachers. Along with this shortage of middle school educator

stress data, is the rarely investigated variable of phases of the career teacher as it relates

to middle grades educator stress. The intention of this research is to investigate the relationship between middle grades educator stress and phases of the career teacher.

A sequential mixed methods research approach was utilized in order to collect information regarding middle grades stressors in relation to teacher career phase. A focus group with middle grades educators was conducted with the purpose of honing in on stressors experienced regularly by middle grades teachers. Focus group data was collected, transcribed and analyzed using the In Vivo Coding technique and seven reoccurring stress themes were identified. Based upon these themes a survey was developed for another group of middle grades educators. Survey participants were asked to evaluate the workplace stressors identified in the focus group and rank them by relevance, in addition to classifying their current career phase. Lastly, this data was then recorded and analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS.

Seven themes were identified in the focus group as stressors which impact middle grades educators: 1) *parents*, 2) *having to wear a lot of hats*, 3) *teaching instead of giving students time to discover*, 4) *administration*, 5) *student behavior*, 6) *pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly* and 7*) students are not developmentally ready for many things*. Then, when participants were asked explicitly about specific stressors at various teacher phases, the top stressors varied greatly. Educators in their current practice identified *having to wear a lot of hats as the top stressor*, while the top stressor for new career educators was determined to be *pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly*. However, when asked if stressors varied or remained the same for educators regarding career phase, almost a 50% divide was noted,

making it difficult to determine the extent to which there is a relationship between middle

grades educator stressors and phase of the career teacher.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Highly qualified teaching professionals are desperately needed in order to maintain a competent and critically thinking population of people who have the ability to preserve current culture and compete internationally (Stukes, 2015). Yet, teaching is reported as being a stressful career leading to fast burnout and traditionally, mass teacher departures in the United States (Abenavoli, Greenburg, Harris, Jennings & Katz, 2013; Beers, 2012; Faulk, Gloria, Jaggars & Steinhardt, 2011; Fisher, 2011; Gold & Roth, 2003, Haverback & Mee, 2014; Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell & Wang, 2009; & Li-Grining, Martin, Sass & Schmitt, 2012; Raver & Zhai, 2011). A basic and demonstrative precursor to ones job satisfaction is the level of stress associated with the tasks and demands (Henry, Kitchel, Lawver, Park, Robinson, Schell & Smith, 2012).

Teacher stress is an internationally investigated area of interest. Teacher stress can be identified as the negative emotions experienced by educators such as frustration, anger, tension, anxiety, or depression due to some aspect of their work environment in schools (Kyriacou, 2001; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978). Teaching has been identified as an occupation that has high stress components which can be seen in the job dissatisfaction and low levels of overall physiological well-being reported in its employees (Cartwright, Cooper, Donald, Johnson, Millet & Taylor, 2005). The cause of teacher stress has been reported to involve a complex web of personal and professional factors, which interact with one another daily (Doney, 2013). The alarming stressors teachers face demand attention and the promotion of educator well-being is crucial in order to avoid career burnout in the teaching profession (Abenavoli, Greenberg, Harris, Jennings and Kat

2013) and also sustain successful classroom teachers for students.

Stressful experiences, described as transactions between a person and the environment, is identified in the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). When an individual evaluates the significance of a stressor, the person must then determine how to resolve the stress issue in terms of the coping resources possessed by the individual (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Several disciplines including education, nursing, psychology and social psychology have identified stress and coping as vital variables that impact ones health (Lyon, 2012). The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping emphasizes the belief that ones health and emotional well-being is determined by an individual's capacity to cope and function in stressful situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). If ones coping mechanisms prove to be unsuitable, stress is the ultimate outcome; however, educators who acquire more adaptive coping strategies for their stress are less likely to suffer from burnout symptoms than educators who identify their primary coping strategies to be avoiding or ignoring problematic situations (Van Dick & Wagner, 2001).

Teachers are exposed to abundant sources of stress in the workplace (Black, 2011; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Plog, Schaubman & Stetson, 2011; Richards, 2012; Skaalvik, & Skaalvik, 2015; Stukes, 2015). Stress found in educators can be explained as a perceived inequality of classroom resources and demands (Faulk, Gloria, Jaggars & Steinhardt, 2011; Fitchett, Lambert, Lineback, McCarthy & Reiser, 2015). Educators have reported succumbing to various stressors at the elementary, middle and secondary levels of education practice.

In terms of teacher stress, there will always be a need for continuous and exploratory

studies to monitor the prevalence and sources of teacher stress (Kyraicou, 2001). Though

the consequences of stress differ from person to person, the reaction to and signs of stress

are similar in almost all people (Adams, Harlin, McKim & Rayfield, 2013; Selye, 1976).

Prolonged stress invites countless issues into the workplace (Danielsson, Heimerson,

Lundberg, Perski, Stefansson & Akerstedt, 2012). An individual's reaction to stress can

be physical, emotional or physiological, which impacts work-place productivity and

efficiency (Adams, et. al). Gradual digression of productivity due to motivation

challenges can be portrayed in individuals who experience career burnout (Dennis, 2008).

Teacher burnout is a general concept that encompasses qualities such as: stress,

dissatisfaction with the profession, absenteeism, low professional interest and the desire

to leave the occupation (DeJesus & Lens, 2006). Educators who report being stressed out

have proven to be additionally burned out (Faulk, Gloria, Jaggars & Steinhardt, 2011;

Van Dick & Wagner, 2001). Maintaining ones physical, emotional and social health is

remarkably noteworthy in alleviating day-to-day stressors for educators (Abenavoli,

Greenburg, Harris & Katz, 2013; Chen, Paquette & Rieg, 2007). Knowledge regarding

educator stressors and symptoms of stress is valuable in order to understand how to

manage the factors that instigate stress for teachers (Chen & Miller, 1997; Chen, Paquette

& Rieg, 2007; Crafford & Viljoen, 2013). Given the current trend of many new teachers

abandoning a career in education, identifying the factors related to stress and applicable

coping mechanisms, are crucial components of sustaining an effective teacher workforce

(Chen, Paquette & Rieg, 2007).

Middle schools particularly require an effective group of educators. Middle schools in

the United States enroll over twenty million rapidly diverse and changing adolescents

aged ten to fifteen on any given day (National Middle School Association, 2003). Middle school, as organized in the United States, is the most common form in which to classify students in grades six through eight (Lounsbury, 2003). The middle school movement emerged in the 1960's, documenting a need for a more custom approach to teaching students in early adolescence (Armstrong, 2006; National Middle School Association, 2003). Tailoring the school organization to the needs of the students in this stage of development was a chief component of the middle school movement (George, 2009; Loundsbury, 2009). A trademark of teaching middle school students includes the use of teacher strategies designed to appeal to the emotional and intellectual development in addition to the social needs of middle grades students (Dickinson, 2001; George, 2009; Musoleno & White, 2010).

When properly implemented, the middle school theory meets the needs of developing learners and flourishes (Alexander, 1974; Dickinson, 2001; Greene & McEwin, 2010; Lounsbury & Vars, 2003). Though challenges have been endured, the middle school concept still remains an endorsed model for organizing young adolescents schooling (Greene & McEwin, 2010). The middle school movement has similarly produced both an effective and caring group of teachers with unique skill sets geared toward the growth and development of the middle school learner (Lounsbury & Vars, 2003).

Effective educators are crucial for the middle school learner, as this population of students is dealing with such varying physical and emotional needs. Middle grades teachers are expected to relate to their classroom of students while also adjusting daily instruction to meet the needs of developing adolescents (Haverback, Mee & Passe, 2012). These combined expectations often provoke stress in middle grades educators.

Uncovering and understanding the negative emotions that can be related to external stressors is one of the first steps in achieving professional satisfaction and better performance in educators and higher levels of teacher retention in education (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005).

Many professions recognize employees' years of experience as a significant factor in human resource decisions concerning compensation, benefits and promotional decisions; the idea is embraced that experience, increased over time, enriches the knowledge, skills and productivity of personnel (Rice, 2010). Education is one of the few professions, which maintains equal responsibilities for a novice teacher as it does an experienced veteran classroom teacher (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). Preserving capable and effective teachers in the teaching profession is crucial. The *Life Cycle of the Career Teacher*, also referred to as the Teacher Career Phase Model was developed as a way in which to emphasize the progression of developmental phases educators undergo as career teachers (Steffy, 2000). This career phase advocacy model was established with the purpose of enriching the teaching profession by highlighting phases of progression for career-long educators needed in order to sustain a certain level of excellence (Steffy, 2000). The career model for educators has six phases which include (in order of advancement): novice, apprentice, professional, expert, distinguished and emeritus (Steffy, 2000).

Educators beginning their careers are particularly vulnerable when it comes to dealing with stress that accompanies inexperienced teaching (Beers, 2012; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). Additionally, it has been identified that teachers experience less negative emotion [stress] as teaching experience accumulates (Beers, 2012; Green, 2014).

To compromise these findings however, Chan, Chen & Chong (2010) and Fisher (2011), in separate studies, found no significant distinction in stress levels between beginning teachers compared to more experienced educators. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015) also resolved that perceived causes of stress are consistent for all educators, regardless of years of experience.

As interpreted by the conflicting findings, Rice (2010) defends that experience, beyond the first few years of teaching, can be viewed as an irrelevant factor in predicting productivity in educators because new teachers often having more energy than veteran educators. Regardless, all teachers require support, newer educators may benefit from mentoring and lesson plan assistance whereas veteran educators may value burnout prevention techniques and professional growth opportunities (Lambert, McCarthy & Reiser, 2014; Stukes, 2015).

In the forthcoming literature review it is noted that studies have been conducted using varying methods to research the plethora of stress sources for educators (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). The most widely used approach to exploring teacher stress is quantitative questionnaire surveys (Kyriacou, 2001), however, there is a void in the literature specifically identifying the extent to which stressors impact middle grades educators as it relates to their phase as a career teacher.

Statement of The Problem

The literature supports the known finding that teachers are stressed throughout all periods of their professional career. The issue of teacher stress is a relatively new area of study, with only half a century of literature documenting relevant findings. The prevalent issue of educator stress has been linked to concerns associated with student achievement, educator well-being and overall school improvement, prompting its interest

internationally. The primary means of gathering work-related stress data from educators has been quantitatively through self-reported surveys. In addition to this method, participants have generally been categorized as teachers specializing in elementary or secondary education, with very little comparative data recorded for middle grades teachers.

Middle school, spanning grades six through eight, is one of the most unique student populations with supplementary physical and emotional needs requiring consideration when educators plan classroom instruction. Middle school teachers have the most challenging endeavor in terms of student population, and yet little data has been recorded identifying their specific professional stressors. Along with this shortage of middle school educator stress data, is the rarely investigated variable of phases of the career teacher as it relates to middle grades educator stress. Education is a field with a growing attrition problem for beginning educators, often due to the stressors in the workplace. Veteran teachers have reported feelings of less negative emotion as teaching experience is gained. Yet conflicting literature argues that causes of stress supersede age and teacher career phase.

The void in literature regarding middle grades teacher stress as it could potentially be impacted by phases of the career teacher is needed for administrative bodies governing schools, districts, states and countries. This untapped area of research could lead to improved understanding of middle grades teacher's professional needs and could lead to enhanced student experience and achievement benefitting all educational parties. Therefore, the researcher proposes to investigate the relationship between middle grades educator stress and phases of the career teacher due to the lack of research and the

potential to enhance school environments, the well-being of teachers and learning atmospheres of students in the classroom.

Research Questions

The essential variables for this study include: a) middle grades educator stress and b) phases of the career teacher.

Research Questions

1) What stressors are present in the work-place for middle grades educators?

2) How do middle school educator stressors compare based on the career phase of the teacher?

3) To what extent is there a relationship between middle grades educator stress and phases of the career teacher?

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks outlining the extent to which there is a relationship between middle grades teacher stressors and teacher career phase includes: The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and the Teacher Career Phase "Life Cycle" Model (Steffy, 2000). These frameworks are envisioned to guide the research and also to support the literature that has been published prior to this study.

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping Theory

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping Theory is a framework which identifies stressful experiences as transactions between a person and the environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). When an individual evaluates the significance of stressor, he or she must then determine how to resolve the stress issue in terms of the individuals coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping underlines the notion that the health and emotional well-being of a person is

determined by an individual's capacity to cope and function in stressful situations

(Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Lazarus & Folkman's Transactional          │
│  Model of Stress and Coping Theory          │
│    •Individual and Environmental Interaction │
│       producing the stimuli (stressors)      │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                      ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│    Individuals perception of stress filter   │
│  • Primary Appraisal (how do I interpret     │
│     stressors?)                              │
│      • Secondary Appraisal (an analysis of   │
│         resources available)                 │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                      ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                   Stress                     │
│  (when resources are insufficient for the   │
│                  demands)                    │
│      •Coping (overcoming of stress)          │
│      •Reappraisal (learning and redirecting) │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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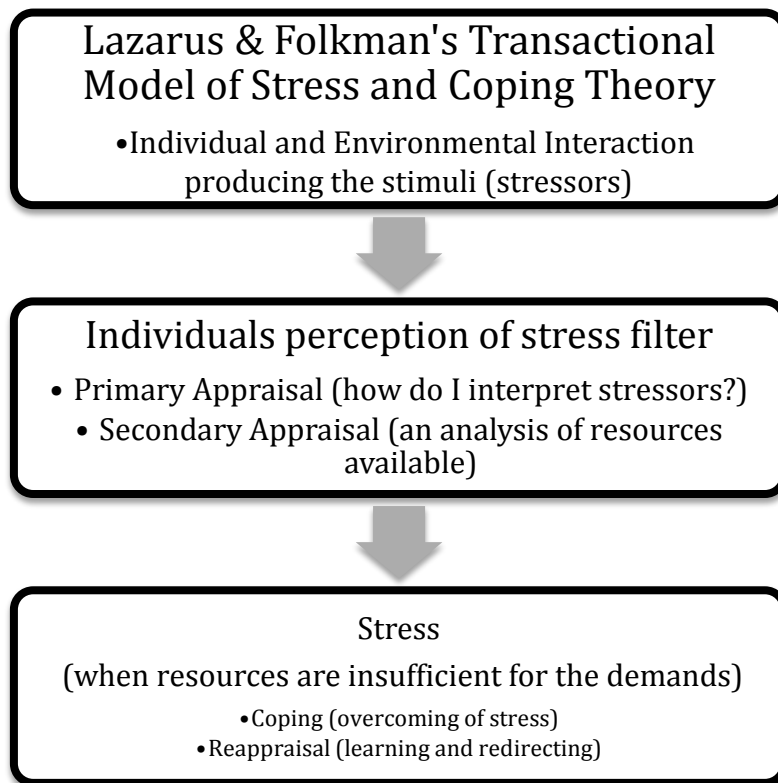
Figure 1: Conceptual framework for Stress

Teacher Career Phase "Life Cycle" Model

The Teacher Career Phase Model, also known as the "Life Cycle of the Career

Teacher" is intended to accentuate the way in which an educator progresses through

developmental phases as career teachers (Steffy, 2000). This advocacy model was

developed with the intention of enhancing the teaching profession by providing

progressive phases needed in order to sustain excellence in career-long educators (Steffy,

2000). The career phases described below are grounded in relevant literature in the fields

of learning, teaching, schooling and classroom practices (Steffy, 2000).
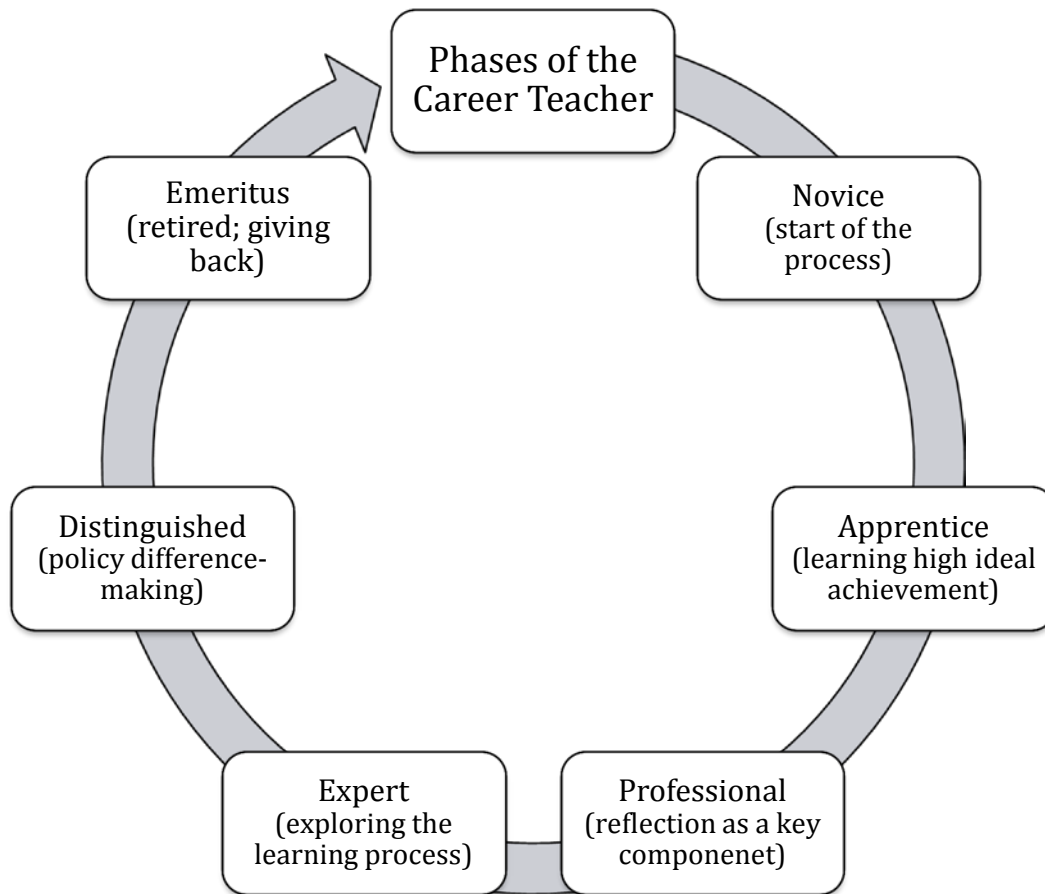
Figure 2: Conceptual framework for the Teacher Career Phase "Life Cycle" Model

Figure 1 illustrates stress as an interaction between the individual and stress and

incorporates the ways in which an individual appraises and copes with stress. Figure 2

illustrates how the phases or life cycle of the career teacher, first by the novice, then

apprentice, followed by professional, then expert, distinguished and lastly emeritus phase

(Steffy, 2000). The researcher would like to investigate the extent to which there is a

relationship between an educator's interpretation of stress (as outlined in Figure 1) and

the phase in which an educator currently relates to in his or her career (as outlined in

Figure 2).
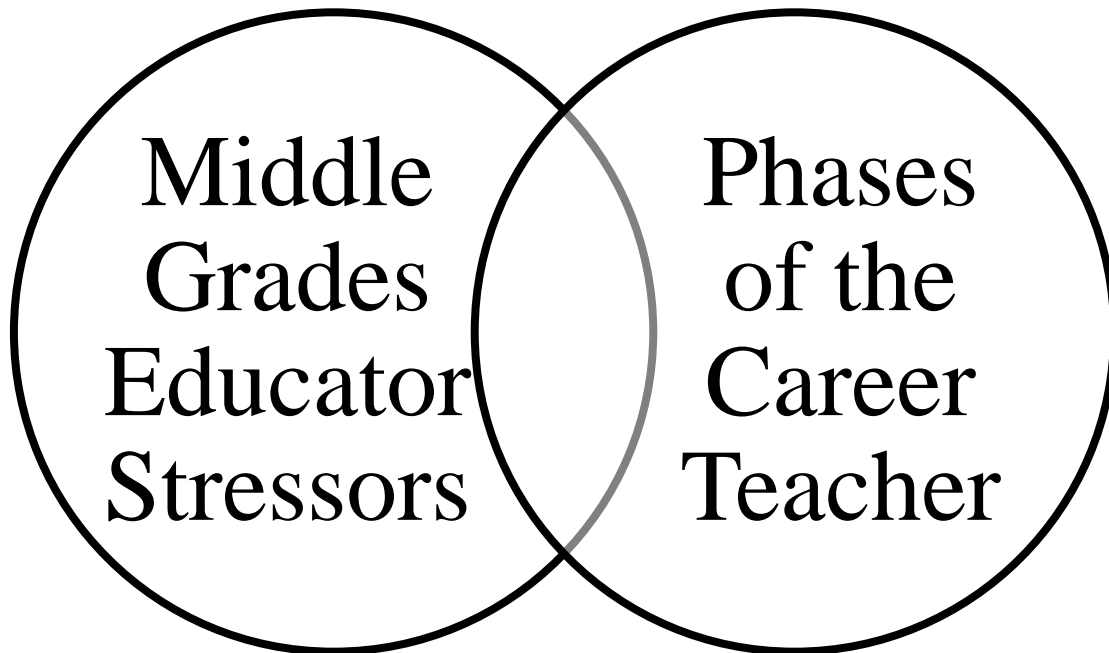
Importance of The Study

The importance of this study is vast to educational systems, particularly middle schools. It offers school and district leaders valuable information for improving school environments and morale as it relates to middle grades educator stress. If educator stress is considered a priority in middle schools, the quality of classroom learning environments could be enriched for both students and educators. Additionally, this study adds to the void in explicitly middle grades educator stress research. The results of this mixed methods study add to a growing body of teacher stress research, and provide understanding into the role that career teacher phases play in middle grades educator stress.

The results of this study give insight into the demands and stress levels of teaching professionals at various phases of their career. This information equips schools and districts with appropriate information to provide professional learning opportunities and

proactive strategies in regards to specific teacher stressors. Though an explicit relationship was not identified between middle grades educator stress and phases of the career teacher, school leadership still has a platform in which to improve teacher quality and well-being in schools. Initiatives have the potential to take place with the intention of reducing negative consequences initiated by work-place stressors or promoting energy in educators by focusing on relevant stressors. The information collected from this study regarding educator stressors is of immeasurable value because of the top stressors identified solely by a middle grades educator participant population. Leadership now has a platform on which they can evaluate stressors impacting the well-being of current teachers, and can do something to improve the morale, classroom and school climates.

This study is significant to the researcher because of the insight it provides for improving so many components of a school: classroom environment, school environment, middle grades teacher well-being and overall student learning and classroom experience. The stress of middle grades educators deserves to be studied, and middle school teachers deserve to have their opinions shared. Enhancing the professional well-being of educators as it relates to stress is desperately in need of attention, and leadership now has the opportunity to help middle school teachers with this area of need.

Procedures

The overwhelming interest in educator stress internationally is well documented in the literature. Teacher stress is prevalent and is primarily documented quantitatively for elementary and secondary educators, but much less research has been geared towards middle grades educator stress. The need for investigation is vital due to the potential impact the results of this study could have on school environment, teacher well-being, morale and overall student classroom experience.

A mixed methods approach to gathering information concerning middle grades stressors in various career phases was utilized for this study. The identified population is middle grades teachers (currently teaching in grades 6-8) in the State of Georgia. To begin, middle grades educators, from varying backgrounds and phases in their teaching career were interviewed in a focus group with the purpose of collecting qualitative narrative data highlighting the leading stressors which impact middle grades teachers. Then, after recording and transcribing the focus group data collected from the participants, the researcher identified reoccurring themes and patterns in the focus group data regarding educator stressors through the In Vivo coding technique (Saldana, 2016).

After analyzing and synthesizing this data, the top stressors were identified by the researcher based on the qualitative interview data collected and then formulated into a quantitative survey. Then, using a paper-based survey, another group of middle grades teachers were asked to complete the survey based upon the relevance to their experience with stress at work by ranking the top stressors identified in the focus group. Additionally, when teachers completed the survey concerning their top stressors, they were asked to identify the career phase that best describes their current position. This paper-based survey technique is a quantitative way in which to gather information from people and is intended to collect data of opinion on a specific topic of participant expertise. After this survey was completed and returned by participants, the researcher then used descriptive statistics in SPSS to analyze and organize the participant responses. Based upon the analyzation of data, the identified research questions concerning middle grades educator stressors and phase in the teaching profession were answered.

A mixed methods research study was the best approach in terms of gathering information to determine the extent to which there is a relationship between middle grades educator stress and teacher career phase. The qualitative component of this study allowed educators from various backgrounds to provide relevant and personal insight into the stressors specific to the middle grades classroom. The quantitative components permitted the researcher to hone in on the most common and prevalent stressors found in the middle grades teacher workplace.

Limitations/Delimitations

A limitation of this study was that the researcher has years of experience in the middle school classroom and has experiential biases concerning teacher stress. Additionally, assumptions of the population regarding work-related stress could be held by the researcher. However, having the experience of teacher stress peaked the curiosity of the researcher in terms of further investigation of the topic.

A delimitation of this study could be the lack of survey follow-up, as may be found in a longitudinal study. This study is intended to measure the perceptions of the population at a particular point in time, and will not allow for comparative development as would be seen in a study which surveyed at multiple times during a school term. Also, if multiple focus groups had been conducted within each phase of the career teacher, the stressors for middle school educators would have a stronger relevance for more diverse populations.

Definition of Terms

Middle School: The middle school, in the United States, is the most common form in which to organize students in grades six through eight (Lounsbury, 2003).

Stress: The disproportion between the demands placed on an individual and one's ability to adequately manage them (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Danielsson,

Heimerson, Lundberg, Perski, Stefansson & Akerstedt, 2012; Demarzo, Garcia-

Campayo, Gascon, & Prado-Abril, 2014; Faulk, Gloria, Jaggars and Steinhardt, 2011).

Work-Related Stress: Stress perceived or provoked in an individual's occupational

environment (Brown, Mahan, Mahan, Park, Shelton & Weaver, 2010; Cartwright,

Cooper, Donald, Johnson, Millet & Taylor, 2005; Harper & Stevenson, 2006).

Summary

The relatively recent interest in teacher stress as a necessary research endeavor is a

reflection of the importance and prevalence of the issue of stress in education. Much of

the quantitative data collected from educators regarding work-related stress has been

geared towards elementary and secondary teachers. Little information can be found,

however, specifically documenting middle grades educator stress. This group of teachers

have unique work demands due to the physical and emotional components that

accompany their adolescent students in the classroom, and deserve attention.

Studies regarding the relationship between stress and phases of the career teacher are

also limited and have conflicting conclusions in terms of the group of teachers most

prone to specific work-related stressors. Lastly, with even less scholarly attention, is the

extent to which there is a relationship between middle grades educator stress and teacher

career phase. This study allowed for necessary qualitative data through a focus group

honing in on the unique experiences and expertise of middle grades educators in the

classroom. This information provided an applicable relevance for the study. In addition,

quantitative results offered direct insight into numeric data regarding teacher career phase

(specific to middle grades teachers), which gives opportunity to school leadership to hone

in on specific groups of educators and their particular work-related stressors. Since it was

difficult to determine whether there was a significant relationship between stress and

phases of the career teacher, beneficial knowledge for leadership in terms of stressors specific to middle grades teachers can still be obtained. The quantitative data additionally provides relevant middle grades educator stress information to school leadership, district leadership, professional learning leaders and state leaders in hopes of improving overall work environments for teachers and learning environments for students.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND RELATED RESEARCH

This literature review was written with the intent of examining theoretical frameworks for the proposed study and also with the purposeful objective of revisiting prior research in the areas of stress, middle grades educators and years of professional teaching experience. The theoretical frameworks outlining the extent to which there is a relationship between middle grades teacher stressors and phases of the career teacher include: The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and the Phase of the Career Teacher "Life Cycle" Model (Steffy, 2000). These frameworks are envisioned to guide the anticipated research and also the literature that has been published prior to this study.

The researcher will first address stress and its history, dating back to the early twentieth century and beginning the investigation of human stress as a longstanding issue in international society (Selye, 1950). Stress will then be clarified and broken down as it began to make notable appearances in the field of education in the 1960's (Kyriacou, 2001). Issues specific to the teaching profession will then be explored to include: educator's sense of personal responsibility, managing student behavior, accommodating diverse learning needs, school setting, workload and accountability policies, administrative issues and personal versus professional balance in educators. Specific issues that have been reported as impacting middle grades teachers are also addressed, primarily to focus on the unique needs of young adolescents.

Finally, this review of literature will conclude by detailing the following: consequences of stress, teacher job satisfaction and career burnout as all contributing to

or resulting from the issue of stress for educators. Phases of the career teacher, as it relates to the issue of stress, will conclude the literature review. Resolution will finally be seen in the concluding summarization of figures outlining key studies and exploration of valid questions and rationale connecting the frameworks to middle grades educator stressors and phases of the career teacher in education.

Stress

The American Institute of Stress (n.d.) identifies stress as a difficult term to define due to the unpredictable impact it has on individuals. For example, the use of the term "stress" can be applied to conditions with minor challenging stimulation to rigorously aversive conditions (Bartolomucci, Budwalda, De Boer, Flugge, Koolhaas, Korte, Meerlo, Murison, Oliver, Palanza, & Richter-Levin, 2011). The concept of stress covers a wide range of internal and external experiences, which makes it a consistently challenging term to interpret due to the unlike variables that contribute to the stress process (Lazarus, 1993; Stvan, 2013). Stress, then, should not be considered a variable, but should be viewed as a rubric, which consists of numerous variables and processes (Lazarus, 1966). Stress has frequently been identified as the disproportion between the demands placed on an individual and one's ability to adequately manage them (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Danielsson, Heimerson, Lundberg, Perski, Stefansson & Akerstedt, 2012; Demarzo, Garcia-Campayo, Gascon, & Prado-Abril, 2014; Faulk, Gloria, Jaggars and Steinhardt, 2011).

According to the transactional model of stress and coping theory, which will be a theoretical framework used for this study, stress is recognized as the relationship between the environment and the person involved, taking into consideration both the unique characteristics of the person and also the nature of the environment in a given situation

(Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). The transactional model addresses the primary facilitator of person-environment transactions to be appraisal, which could be identified in three forms: primary appraisal, secondary appraisal and reappraisal of the stressors and coping mechanisms maintained by an individual (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984; Lyons, 2012). Folkman and Lazarus' (1984) stress and coping theory is most concerned with the relationship between the person and environment, placing emphasis on the process and change of this relationship in contrast to previously recognized structural and static models of stress. Stress includes the body's non-specific responses to the demands placed upon it or a behavior modification triggered by particular conditions in a changing environment (Chen, Paquette & Rieg, 2007).

History of Stress

Historically, stress has been treated as a concept used for organizing and understanding a wide assortment of phenomena of great importance in human and animal adaptation (Lazarus, 1966). Selye's (1950) original definition of stress was purely the body's nonspecific response to any demand. The theme that has persisted from the origin of the identification of stress to more modern times is the notion of stress as an exterior load or demand on a social, biological or psychological system (Lazarus, 1993).

The concept of stress can be traced back to the seventeenth century, when Robert Hooke, a physicist who studied man-made structures and their resilience, identified stress as the area over which the load encroached upon a bridge (Hinkle, 1973; Lazarus, 1993). The *Centre for Studies on Human Stress* (2016), however, credits Hans Selye with formally identifying the concept of "stress" after concluding his training as a medical doctor in the 1920's.

Selye (1950) explored stress from a physiological viewpoint noting that anything causing stress endangers life unless the stress is accompanied by adequate adaptive responses. However, Selye (1950) also recognized that opposition and adaptability to stress are fundamental building blocks for life and that stress will sustain as a prominent social phenomenon. Stress is measured as a state manifested by a syndrome, and it is impossible to appraise the state of stress if not for the changes it produces (Selye, 1976).

Selye (1976) eventually adapted the all-embracing name of General Adaptation Syndrome (G.A.S.) or the generally known "stress syndrome" as a condition which occurred in three stages: the alarm reaction, the stage of resistance and the stage of exhaustion. The alarm reaction stage embodies the total nonspecific sensations provoked by the sudden exposure to stimuli, seen in signs that may disappear or reappear over time (Selye, 1946; Selye, 1950). Next, the stage of resistance occurs involving all nonspecific systematic reactions in which an organism has attained adaptation due to continuous stimuli exposure (Selye, 1946). Lastly, the stage of exhaustion occurs including the systematic reactions which finally develop as the result of extended exposure to stimuli to which adaptation had been established, but could no longer be maintained (Selye, 1946). In sum, G.A.S. encompasses the characteristics of all bodily actions which result due to prolonged and continued exposure to stress (Selye, 1946).

Due to the varying descriptions throughout the years, it has been proposed that the term "stress" only be applied to conditions in which an environmental demand exceeds the capacity of an organism, particularly unpredictable and uncontrollable situations (Bartolomucci, Budwalda, De Boer, Flugge, Koolhaas, Korte, Meerlo, Murison, Oliver, Palanza, & Richter-Levin, 2011). Stress (as it identifies with the human condition), has

been present in scientific literature since the 1930's, but the widespread and habitual language use was not recognizable until the 1970's, building up to modern use of the term "stress" to identify with a variety of human experiences (Lyon, 2012).

Teacher Stress

Work-related stressors are noticeable concerns for most employees (Brown, Mahan, Mahan, Park, Shelton & Weaver, 2010; Cartwright, Cooper, Donald, Johnson, Millet & Taylor, 2005; Harper & Stevenson, 2006). Work-related stress, for instance, has been positively linked to mental health (Bruinvels, Frings-Dresen & Nieuwenhuijsen, 2010; Oi-Ling, 1995). There are two conflicting outcomes an individual can experience due to stress; for example, acceptable levels of stress can lead to increased individual performance in the workplace, while excessive stress can produce a decreased level of productivity (Harper & Stevenson, 2006). Industries associated with helping others such as social work, nursing and education, have historically demonstrated higher levels of stress than other occupations resulting in observable burnout and abandonment of those professions (Dennis, 2008; Gold & Roth, 2003; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1977).

Stress is a feature that is widespread in the field of education and teaching (Troman, 2000). It has been said that recruiting and maintaining respectable educators should be one of the greatest agendas for our nation (Darling-Hammond, 2010). So, the first step in confronting the issue of stress is to recognize its existence in the teaching profession (Dunham, 2002). Educator stress can be identified as the experience teachers have of negative emotions such as frustration, anger, tension, anxiety, or depression resulting from some aspect of their work in schools with students (Kyriacou, 2001; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978). However, causes and results of stress vary from person to person (Adams, Harlin, McKim & Rayfield, 2013; Harper & Stevenson, 2006).

Teaching is well-known as an occupation that has high components of stress as outlined by the job dissatisfaction and low levels of psychological and physical well-being reported in its employees (Cartwright, Cooper, Donald, Johnson, Millet & Taylor, 2005). The evaluation of occupational stress found in educators is increasingly growing as a significant component in maintaining and motivating educators in schools (Fimian, 1988). Efforts in conducting research concerning the plethora of stress sources for teachers and how they relate to other complexly related constructs are becoming more and more popular (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005).

History of Teacher Stress

Teaching has been accepted as an emotionally demanding and potentially challenging profession for several years (Lambert, McCarthy & O'Donnell, 2008). Dunham (1976) first recognized teacher stress as an area of practical study after discovering that severe stress was impacting educators in the classroom. Therefore, it was not until the 1970's that researchers began to investigate the specific nature of teacher anxieties and concerns (Kyriacou, 2001). Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1977) assisted in further pioneering research efforts in the specific area of teacher stress in both the United States and United Kingdom. Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1977) were among the first to provide a tangible explanation of teacher stress, describing it as a negative state experienced by an educator as a consequence of negative perceptions of the classroom setting (Lambert, McCarthy & Reiser, 2014). Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1979) experimented with quantitative self-reported questionnaires filled out by educators, which guided them to the conclusion that educators found their careers to be very stressful.

Prior to 1990, the perception of teacher stress was primarily identified by the cause-and-effect approach (Oi-ling, 1995). Dunham (1992) was more refined in his teacher

stress research efforts by identifying stress as the prolonged effects of physical, emotional, behavioral reactions, which are perceived as greater than the availability of coping strategies. The rationale behind Dunham's (1992) approach to understanding stress is that more consideration should be focused on coping and problem-solving behaviors for stress in educators to resolve the stress issue. Additionally, the imperative nature of considering each teacher's distinctive occupational contexts, specifically cognitive and motivational variables, were documented as thoughtfully considered research details (Eriksen & Lazarus, 1952; Kyriacou, 2001).

The Profession of Teaching

Teaching is noted as one of the largest and oldest professional groups in the United States (Haverback & Mee, 2014). The classroom educator, by virtue of the role as presenter, leader, diplomat and disciplinarian, accepts the single greatest responsibility for configuring optimal learning environments for diverse student bodies with innumerable interests, abilities and needs (Eastep & Huss, 2011). High-quality teachers are the most influential variable when determining student success (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Eastep, et. al., 2011; Martin, Kragler, Quatroche, & Bauserman, 2014). When educators enter the profession, enthusiasm and idealism is typically expressed for the new adventure, with primary goals being to make a difference in the lives of students and also to feel purpose in their own lives (Richards, 2012). Educators are known to also impact students less by the formal, direct instruction and more by wayside teaching through small personal deeds, exploratory questions, subtle prompts, earned acclamations and individual encounters during the classroom experience (Lounsbury, 2009).

Teachers play the most central role in fostering a positive classroom climate of intentional student learning and social-emotional well-being, but the demands and

stressors on teachers can inhibit that influential and fostering classroom environment (Bonus, Davidson, Flook, Goldberg & Pinger, 2013). Educators face a demanding task in meeting the needs of diverse learners and providing academic, social and emotional support to all students, a task which is paired with teachers' mandated accountability procedures and high-stakes testing in the United States (Abenavoli, Greenberg, Harris, Jennings & Katz, 2013; Berryhill, Fromewick & Linney, 2009; Plog, Schaubman & Stetson, 2011). Teachers additionally are responsible for daily maintenance and management of a classroom environment that is conducive to increased student achievement and permits all students' access to learning (Aloe, Amo & Shanahan, 2014). Effective teachers are not only resilient leaders in managing student behavior, but are also exceptional at instruction and addressing student issues as part of their responsibilities (Aloe, Amo & Shanahan, 2014; Plog, Schaubman & Stetson, 2011).

Teacher Responsibilities

Responsibility can be classified as an individual's internal sense of commitment and obligation, self-determination and also critical self-judgment (Lauermann & Karabenick, 2011). Responsibility, from an educational perspective can be described as a professional's accountability to their work, as well as the educator's active participation in student learning and school policy (Anfara & Knox, 2013). In addition to the job duties outlined in teaching contracts, many educators also feel an innate responsibility to be a positive role model in the classroom, call students by their name, show students that they are respected and actively listen to students when they speak on a daily basis (Bernard, King, Murnan, Nabors & Vidourek, 2011).

Direct teacher responsibilities however, include: following educational regulations and ethical standards, continual self-evaluation of one's own effective teaching strategies and

concerns about the needs of students and their educational outcomes (Lauermann & Karabenick, 2011). Teachers feel various realms of responsibility such as the obligation to comply with school rituals, imposed systems of accountability and also responsibilities associated with high-quality professionalism (Lauermann & Karabenick, 2011). Teachers often are perceived as being respectful and helpful, many with the intention of providing a positive school climate for the students (Conderman, Kackar-Cam, Neto & Walker, 2013; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015).

The career path of teaching includes enormous amounts of uncertainty and unpredictability every day, especially as it relates to regulating emotions and responsiveness to others in a manner that is both flexible and consistently effective (Beers, Jennings, Roeser & Skinner, 2012). In short, the benefits of teaching have become progressively concealed due to the complex and demanding work environments and expected responsibilities (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Kaspereen, 2012).

The Stressful Nature of the Teaching Profession

Teaching has been overwhelmingly reported as being a stressful career leading to fast burnout and traditionally, mass teacher departures in the United States (Abenavoli, Greenburg, Harris, Jennings & Katz, 2013; Beers, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Epps & Foor, 2015; Faulk, Gloria, Jaggars & Steinhardt, 2011; Fisher, 2011; Gold & Roth, 2003, Haverback & Mee, 2014; Kyriacou, 2001; Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell & Wang, 2009; and Li-Grining, McIntyre, 2011, Martin, Sass & Schmitt, 2012; Raver & Zhai, 2011). Stress, teacher burnout and attrition have reached frightening degrees, which threatens the ultimate quality of education and student achievement (Faulk, et. al.). The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher (2012) reported that 51% of teachers felt

greatly stressed multiple days a week, which is a notable increase over the 36% of teachers who reported on that level in 1985. Due to teacher stress being a possible barrier for student learning and achievement, it is important to recognize the signs and causes of stress in educators (Kipps-Vaughn, 2013).

Some signs, such as job satisfaction, comfort in managing in the classroom and career burnout are significant predictors of stress for educators (Fisher, 2011). Self-efficacy, personal relationships and personality type also play significant roles in educator stress and occupational commitment, which leads to a complex and individualistic issue concerning educator stress (Lambert, McCarthy & Reiser, 2014). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported 51% of public school teachers who left the profession in 2012-2013 described the manageability, working conditions and stress of the workload in their current non-teaching position to be superior to teaching. Therefore, unless policies are established to encourage teacher attrition through improved preparation, assignment, working environments and mentor provision, the ambition of ensuring and maintaining qualified teachers for all students cannot be met or maintained (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

International Teacher Stress

Internationally, research regarding teacher stress has been established as a major area of interest (Battiato, Casicio, Constantino, Elastico & Zapparrata, 2014; Chan, Chen & Chong, 2010; Kyriacou, 2001). The United States is not the only country that has explored the area of educator stress; there is a global concern for teacher stress and burnout, which can be seen in the range of countries who contribute studies on the topic (Aloe, Amo & Shanahan, 2013; Austin, Fernet, Guay & Senecal, 2012). Though most teacher stress interest has been focused in the countries of the United States (Adams,

Harlin, McKim & Rayfield, 2013; Faulk, Gloria, Jaggars & Steinhardt, 2011; Fisher, 2011; Green, 2014; Stukes, 2015), United Kingdom (Harper & Stevenson, 2006; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1979; Troman, 2000) and Canada (Austin, Fernet, Guay, & Senecal, 2012), international research honed in on educators stress has increased in countries such as: Germany (Van Dick & Wagner, 2001), Hong Kong (Chan, Chen & Chong, 2010; Oi-Ling, 1995), India (Mohanasundaram & Muthuvelayutham, 2012), Israel (Oliver, Shirom & Stein, 2009), Italy (Battiato, Cascio, Constantino, Elastico, Magnano & Zapaprrata, 2014), Norway (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015), South Africa (Crafford & Viljoen, 2013), Spain (Demarzo, Garcia-Campayo, Gascon, Montero-Marin, Prado-Abril, 2014), and also international cross-cultural comparative studies (Bong, Klassen & Usher, 2010; Chen & Miller, 1997).

Issues of excessive hours and work expectations, disorderly students, inadequate support from administration, constant reforms with changes, non-teaching duties, school setting and diverse student populations are all major stressors for teachers on an international scale (Chen & Miller, 1997; Crafford, & Viljoen, 2013). These issues have voiced concerns for preparing committed and effective educators around the world (Eren, 2014). Strategies in the districts of New Zealand and Switzerland include networking with teachers of varying experience in attempt to maintain and sustain new educators in the classroom (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). It should be noted, however, that though studies pertaining to teacher stress have been internationally reported, there is variance within the fundamental attitudes and values regarding teachers and schools around the world due to specific features of national educational systems and opinions of societies as a whole (Kyriacou, 2001).

Specific Stressors of the Teaching Profession

Educators are exposed to numerous sources of stress (Black, 2011; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Plog, Schaubman & Stetson, 2011; Richards, 2012; Skaalvik, & Skaalvik, 2015; Stukes, 2015). The stress of teaching professionals is primarily caused by a perceived inequality of classroom resources and demands (Faulk, Gloria, Jaggars & Steinhardt, 2011; Fitchett, Lambert, Lineback, McCarthy & Reiser, 2015). Constant pressures are exposed to educators from school administration, learners, parents and the Department of Education (Crafford & Viljoen, 2013). It should be noted, however, that a teacher's sense of stress is regularly based on his or her own interpretation of certain events as stressful (Green, 2014). For educators, stress is a complex issue resulting from a multifaceted web of factors, which interact with one another regularly (Doney, 2013; Fimian, 1988). Teachers can describe how stress negatively and directly impacts not only work performance, but also the overall relationships and interactions with students (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011).

Personal responsibility. The role of a teacher is often extended beyond the hours of school operation (Kaspereen, 2012; Richards, 2012; Stukes, 2015). In addition to allocated accountabilities, teachers also feel a sense of personal responsibility for significant educational goals (Eren, 2014; Lauermann, 2013). A teacher's sense of personal responsibility has the potential to impact their educational and instructional practices, psychological health, and inevitably their students' knowledge acquisition and eventual performance in a course (Lauermann, 2013). Essential motivational implications can be observed in an educators' sense of personal responsibility; for instance, individuals regularly participate in behaviors not because they are particularly enjoyable,

but rather due to an internal sense of commitment and obligation to do so (Lauermann, 2013; Lauermann & Karabenick, 2011).

When one chooses to become a teacher, and maintains the capacity to stay in teaching, personal gratification, in terms of meaning and satisfaction, is an imperative consideration for educators (Goodman-Delahunty & Howes, 2015). Educator feelings of responsibility and role vary, as some teachers take full responsibility for student's needs, while others view the needs as a shared responsibility (Moreau, 2014). Teachers, and the groups to which they feel responsible- students, parents and administrators for example-can be regarded as a vigorous network of mutual responsibility, which has implications for how educators define their roles as professionals (Lauermann, 2013). Stress research has not taken into consideration the various degrees of accountability that teachers feel on a daily basis for different responsibilities that may be formal or internal roles for the educator (Lauermann & Karabenick, 2011).

Managing student behavior. Student behavior is a leading cause of teacher stress, which includes student lack of effort and interest, not paying attention, aggressiveness towards the teacher, breaking rules and general hyperactivity or noisiness in the classroom (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Beers, 2012; Brown, Mahan, Mahan, Park, Shelton & Weaver, 2010; DeJesus & Lens, 2006; Fisher, 2011; Kyriacou, 2001; Richards, 2012). Student misbehavior can largely impact teachers in addition to the overall influence it can have on general student learning caused by the disruption of the classroom environment (Carson, Matthews & Tsouloupas, 2014; Plog, Schaubman & Stentson, 2011). Addressing rebellious behaviors in public schools is a daunting task; disrespect from students in the classroom can be predictive of teacher burnout and

emotional exhaustion (Alter, Haydon, Landers & Servilio, 2011). Student interferences aid in creating a frenzied classroom environment, which leaves teachers feeling dissatisfied and less proficient (Aloe, Amos & Shanahan, 2014). Overall, disruptive student behavior enhances the challenges present throughout the teaching process (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000).

Positive classroom environments are an expectation to be maintained by educators in order to provide a quality climate for learning that encourages students' participation in social interactions with one another (Carson, Matthews & Tsouloupas, 2014; Plog, Schaubman & Stentson, 2011). Challenging behaviors from students in the classroom can have a negative impact on teacher effectiveness and job satisfaction (Alter, Haydon, Landers & Servilio, 2011). Particularly, disrespect as a student behavior in the classroom is a predictor of stress and burnout for educators (Alter, Haydon, Landers & Servilio, 2011; Dennis, 2008).

Diverse learning needs. Effectively meeting the needs of low achieving students and students with various levels of knowledge are noteworthy stressors for teachers as a whole (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Berryhill, Fromewick & Linney, 2009; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). The 21st century population of students advocates that schools become more responsive to the assortment of languages, cultures, experiences, interests and economics in the modern classroom, which implies providing equity of access to quality learning opportunities for the all-encompassing spectrum of learners (Tomlinson, 2015). In addition to the plethora of special and diagnosable needs students bring to the classroom, varied interests, family circumstances, support systems, experiences and degrees of maturity all factor into the learning experience for students

(Tomlinson, 2015). Tailoring lessons to meet the individual learner in a classroom is a task that is uneasy and professionally challenging (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Chen, Paquette & Rieg, 2007). It can be demanding for teachers to meet each individual student at their distinct learning place daily, using a plethora of learning strategies (unique to each student), while maintaining appropriate learning goals for the individual (Lounsbury & Vars, 2003; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000; Tomlinson, 2015).

The anticipated responsibility of instructing diverse learners is often expected of educators without any training on how to effectively instruct groups with an overabundance of needs, creating notable stress for educators (Plog, Schaubman & Stentson, 2011; Skaalvik, & Skaalvik, 2015). Educators have reported feelings of frustration due to the continuous revising and adaptation of the curriculum to ensure all students' learning needs are sufficiently met (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011). Teachers have perceived themselves as unprepared to adequately support struggling students in their classroom, burdened by time-constraints, ill-equipped resources and, most importantly, lack of proper knowledge to assist students in a meaningful manner (Moreau, 2014).

School setting. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a human motivational approach in which self-directed motivation is considered essential for ideal functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2004). The primary assumption behind the SDT is that the environment plays a critical role in facilitating motivational factors, which in turn, influences an individual's psychological functioning (Austin, Fernet, Guay, & Senecal, 2012). Educators become intrinsically motivated when their job is performed with the intent of achieving personal and valuable goals (Austin, et. al., 2012). Autonomous motivation, or the choice of

initiating behaviors intrinsically, is the type of motivation necessary for environmental success (Deci, et. al., 2004).

School settings associated with high poverty and high minority schools put educators in situations prone to work-related stress, worsening both teacher attrition and mobility (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Fitchett. Lambert, Lineback, McCarthy & Reiser, 2015). High poverty schools also have advanced proportions of inexperienced teachers and lower teacher salary benefits (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Rice, 2010; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). Teachers in situations with increasingly diverse student populations, who lack responsibility and involvement from parents, feel that they have supplementary responsibilities and therefore, a more challenging workload (Aloe, Amo & Shanahan, 2013). Urban school settings often lack controlled behavior of students in addition to maintaining highly qualified professionals (Brown, Burton & Johnson, 2013). Often, the issue of safety within a school environment is a notable stressor for educators who work in diverse settings (Atkins, et. al., 2011; Brown, Mahan, Mahan, Park, Shelton & Weaver, 2010).

Accompanying school climate factors, institutions that are perceived as disorganized and limited in supplies contribute to teacher stress (Atkins, et. al., 2011; Bradshaw, Hershfeldt, Leaf & Pas, 2010). Rural environments, for example, allocate unique issues for teachers involving distance from resources and professional learning opportunities, distinctively informal school environments and close knit community politics (Brown, Burton & Johnson, 2013). Working conditions are a major contributor in educator's decisions to transfer schools or to leave the profession permanently (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Furthermore, it has been noted that educators from well-resourced schools

maintain dissimilar stressors than educators employed at under-resourced institutions (Crafford & Viljoen, 2013).

Workload and accountability policies. Workload is a frequent stressor for teachers with increasing pressure on standardized test performance and accountability (Beers, 2012; Bonus, Davidson, Flook, Goldberg & Pinger, 2013; Kyriacou, 2001; Richards, 2012; Stukes, 2015). Due to the high expectations in accountability, schools have participated in countless programs and practices to expand the academic performance of students and to meet the goals outlined in annual and mandated accountability reports (Anfara & Knox, 2013; Plog, Schaubman & Stentson, 2011). The public community, along with a considerable amount of the profession, has become submissive in accepting the definition of education as the temporary acquisition of information measured by testing with pencil and paper (Lounsbury, 2009; Lounsbury & Vars, 2003). Policies of educational reform support increasing the already substantial load of work on public schools and teachers, which gives the impression that educators and schools are incapable of doing their best unless prompted by mandates (Black, 2011). In terms of accountability, often educators struggle with integrating their own understanding of quality learning and work with the expectations of groups such as the school, system, state and nation to whom they feel responsible (Lauermann, 2013).

Accountability in schools has been enforced recently by reforms such as the *Race to the Top* reform, implemented in 2009 in hopes of designing rigorous and high-quality assessments, keeping highly qualified teachers and leaders in schools, innovating with effective strategies in struggling schools, and making data more available to schools and instructors (White House, 2009). Additionally, in December 2015, the *Every Student*

Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed, reauthorizing the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)* and replacing No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of 2001 (Department of Education, 2015). The ESSA highlights maintaining high academic standards for all student populations while also ensuring accountability for educators and students through assessment and local school improvement plans incorporating state-identified goals dealing with proficiency of students, growth, indicators of quality and success and also graduation rates (Department of Education, 2015). Public apprehension also arises with reform policies, which can lead to negative comments regarding public schools and concern for children achieving on standardized tests, leaving educators trapped within the issues of school reform (Black, 2011). These demands can put tremendous pressure and stress on teachers to ensure that they can adequately deliver content in their classes (Plog, Schaubman & Stentson, 2011).

The overall workload expected of educators is a major source of occupational stress (Stukes, 2015; Van Dick & Wagner, 2001). Teachers often feel severe time constraints in adequately teaching the standards (Berryhill, Fromewick & Linney, 2009; Stukes, 2015). Increasing amounts of instructional time is being devoted to testing and test preparation, which leaves teachers feeling that opportunities to be flexible and creative in the classroom have been lost due to assessment demands (Lounsbury & Vars; Musoleno & White, 2010). One could say that when strictly enforced, high-stakes testing carries numbers of students to failure even prior to taking an assessment (Lounsbury & Vars, 2003). Pressure is placed on educators as a result of high stakes testing, which can impact students' academic and disciplinary outcomes (Bradshaw, Hershfeldt, Leaf & Pas, 2010; Plog, Schaubman & Stentson, 2011). The emphasis on teachers has placed importance on

educational policies and accountability systems intended to improve the educator's instructional practices (Lauermann & Karabenick, 2011). Accountability policies increase the demands placed on the educator leading to another practical source of stress in teachers (Plog, Schaubman & Stentson, 2011).

Regular work hours for educators prove to be insufficient for adequately performing job-related tasks such as grading papers with meaningful feedback and preparing quality lessons which induces stress and intrudes upon personal obligations of the teacher (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011). The workload expected of teachers must be reduced in order to relieve stress, particularly regarding the number of meetings, required documentation and paperwork (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

Administrative issues. Administrative difficulties and instructional resources are large variables of stress studies involving educators (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Beers, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kyriacou, 2001; Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell & Wang, 2009; Richards, 2012; Stukes, 2015). When investigating a school's climate, the administrators must also be investigated due to the substantial role he or she plays in developing the personality of a school (Black, 2011). If teachers feel a lack of support within a school in addition to the changing of curriculum standards, stressors in the form of exhaustion and uncertainty are evident in educators (Aloe, Amo & Shanahan, 2013). For instance, mandatory job placement for educators can result in negative feelings, impacting the quality of the potentially positive mentoring relationship (Chen, Paquette & Rieg, 2007). Administrative neglect or lack of support causes stress, insecurity and lower self-motivation in educators, with students suffering the ultimate consequences (Blase, Blase & Du, 2007). Some teachers feel handicapped when

disciplinary issues arise due to the lack of support from those in leadership (Blase, et. al., 2007; DeJesus & Lens, 2006). Trust is a component of the relationship between teacher and administrator that drives many elements of stress for teachers (Black, 2011). With a lack of trust and respect, it becomes difficult to maintain a sense of support and value in the teaching profession (Black, 2011). Cognitive and emotional support provided to teachers by administration promotes a mutual environment of respect and trust (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010)

Principals in schools have the unique opportunity to assist teachers in accomplishing their work goals by providing support and resources and also allocating minor tasks to staff members who are not in the classroom (Austin, Fernet, Guay, & Senecal, 2012; Goodman-Delahunty & Howes, 2015). If administrators provide environments supportive of the teacher, recognizing problems like absenteeism as possible stress symptoms, teachers would be less likely to quit, leave or call in absent to work (Green, 2014). Effective leaders generally create positive school environments in which accomplished teaching can cultivate (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Van Dick & Wagner, 2001). Many stressors can be alleviated in educators by proper consultation and provision on behalf of higher authorities, added support and availability of applicable funding (Crafford & Viljoen, 2013). Replacing common practices of the system to reduce stress-related issues will reduce the tendency to blame the individual educator for not coping with teacher stress effectively (Chen & Miller, 1997).

Administration teams, who address the desires of the teachers, stimulate an environment in which educators can more readily speak to the needs of the student populations (Kipps-Vaughn, 2013). Strong principals seen as instructional leaders, who

are committed to goals such as readily supplying teachers with acceptable working conditions and instructional materials, attract teachers to do their best and remain in the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Parents of students. In the field of education, the primary means through which parents gain admittance to the internal workings of a school is through the teacher (Vincent, 2013). The relationship teachers have with the parents of their students can strongly be related to both expectations of self-efficacy and depersonalization for educators (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). In this context, depersonalization signifies the felt cynicism and insensitivity towards colleagues, students and parents (Herioux, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

Historically, attempts have been made to preserve schools as dwellings of professional expertise, with an unruffled environment of order and learning, situated apart from the unknown surroundings of home (Vincent, 2013). Educators have indicated that the over or under involvement of parents can be a major contributor to workplace stress (Crafford & Viljoen, 2013; Durham-Barnes, 2011). For instance, social conditions such as deficient parental support can result in consequences for students (Durham-Barnes, 2011; Kaspereen, 2012); whereas, the possibility of communal parental participation proposes a degree of threat to the educator as well (Vincent, 2013).

The teacher-parent relationship has potential to impact students' attitudes towards particular educators and school in general (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). The support and appreciation on behalf of administration is an impactful circumstance for the educator in terms of maintaining a positive and communicative relationship with parents (Blase, Blase & Du, 2007; Doney, 2013).

Personal and professional life balance. The work-related stress that teachers experience not only impacts work performance, but also the personal relationships outside of the school setting (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Blase, Blase & Du, 2007; Doney, 2013; Troman, 2000). Educators experience situations in which school stressors influence or enhance home situations, and similarly home stressors that overflow into the workplace (Troman, 2000). Creating and maintaining a work-life balance that permits educators to be great at their career and also present for their families at home is challenging (Durham-Barnes, 2011, Fall; Stukes, 2015).

A condition unique to the teaching profession is preparing quality substitute teacher lesson plans for life events such as pregnancy, family issues and personal health concerns adding stress to the educator (Doney, 2013). However, it may be beyond the responsibility scope of the workplace to offer support during life transitions of the educator (Durham-Barnes, 2011, Fall).

The ability to earn an acceptable and steady personal income is an essential consideration for teachers when deciding to leave or continue in the teaching profession (Goodman-Delahunty & Howes, 2015). Reason for concern in terms of competitive salary for teachers is justified due to the documented decline in annual income compared to other professions since the early 1990s (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Monetary stability is an accompanying teacher stressor; educators who face financial stress are likely to react negatively, as teachers need to know they are prepared for unplanned events, retirement and challenging times (Anfara & Knox, 2013). Teachers in elementary, middle and secondary settings generally feel stress in terms of inadequate salary compensation (Chen & Miller, 1997). It is believed that offering higher salaries for teachers would

increase the respect for the occupation in addition to encouraging stronger candidates to enter and remain in the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Durham-Barnes, 2011, Fall).

It is essential to consider that the primary sources of stress for a specific teacher are unique and varies depending upon the individual's multifaceted interaction of values, personality, skills and circumstances (Kyriacou, 2001). To adequately measure the multiple levels of personal and school cultural factors that lead to personal disruption in each teacher distinctively is a challenge (Carson, Matthews & Tsouloupas, 2014). It is important to also note that the enormous stressors teachers experience is mostly beyond their authority of control; for instance, how many students are added to a class, whether or not to give students a mandated county or state test or even the financial stability of the state (Richards, 2012).

Teacher Job Satisfaction

An essential and demonstrative precursor to an individual's job satisfaction is the level of stress correlated with the tasks and demands (Henry, Kitchel, Lawver, Park, Robinson, Schell & Smith, 2012). Understanding and adequately measuring teacher job satisfaction is particularly of relevance because of the effects it can have on teacher retention and recruitment (Anfara & Knox, 2013). Maintaining an elevated level of job satisfaction in teachers is a notable goal for administration, schools and systems; employees who are more fulfilled by their job are usually more beneficial and committed to the teaching profession (Epps & Foor, 2015).

Administrators frequently use Maslow's theory defining the hierarchy of needs in order to increase motivation and job satisfaction in educators (Epps & Foor, 2015). Maslow (1943) identified the basic needs of humans and arranged them in a hierarchy of

influence; when one need is fulfilled, the next higher need emerges since satisfied needs are not considered active motivators. Maslow (1943) highlighted the need for people to feel included, accepted and appreciated, and identified it as a psychological threat when this need was not met in humans. Human relationships and meaningful staff connections in authentically collaborative teacher cultures ensure work environments are more productive and pleasant while also serving to reduce stress in educators (Troman, 2000). Teachers who feel connected and a part of a community will tend to remain in those communities and jobs (Epps & Foor, 2015). Therefore, based upon Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, failure to meet lower level needs in educators can contribute to lower levels of job satisfaction.

Teachers overall seem to be satisfied with their jobs due to the positive features of teaching such as assisting students often offset the negative aspects of the teaching profession (Moore, 2012; Stukes, 2015). Educators who firmly believe in their capabilities to positively influence students are typically more satisfied with their occupation and its demands (Epps & Foor, 2015). Teachers have emphasized that the distinct process of teaching and delivering subject knowledge to students is a foundation of teacher job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Stukes, 2015). In addition, teachers with higher levels of self-confidence in managing their own time were found to have lower stress levels (Lambert, Torres & Tummons, 2012). Teachers with elevated job satisfaction are more likely to take initiative in improving teaching efforts and become involved in continuing education (Anfara & Knox, 2013). By increasing educator job satisfaction, teacher retention will improve and more valuable prospects will be urged to enter the profession (Anfara & Knox, 2013).

Low job satisfaction in educators leads to increased likelihood that teachers will quit, transfer to another school or call in sick for work (Green, 2014). Teacher job dissatisfaction is complex with countless causes, some direct or indirect from other sources such as teacher stress, burnout or teaching conditions (Moore, 2012). Professional teaching conditions including class size, access to instructional resources, safety of the school, quality leadership and opportunities for professional growth add greatly to the decisions made by teachers about leaving the profession (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Educators have experiences of stress not only in the areas of personal accomplishment and depersonalization but more particularly as it pertains to emotional exhaustion (Henry, et. al.).

Occupational stress paired with the demands to increase and improve student achievement through standardized test scores leave teachers at a high risk for dissatisfaction with their jobs (Moore, 2012). Educators, in general, tend to find non-teaching duties significantly more stressful than contracted teaching responsibilities (Black, 2011; Sprenger, 2011). Non-teaching duties could include: administering assessments, documenting procedures, paperwork, and parent conferences as opposed to instructing strategically in the classroom (Sprenger, 2011). School districts and leadership groups should, therefore, respond to and examine closely the factors that impact teacher job satisfaction and dissatisfaction due to its unfavorable impact on teacher motivation (Green, 2014).

Career Burnout

The alarming stressors teachers face demand attention and the promotion of educator health, social and emotional well-being is crucial in order to avoid career burnout in the teaching profession (Abenavoli, Greenberg, Harris, Jennings & Katz, 2013; Montgomery

& Rupp, 2005). Burnout can be identified as an emotional exhaustion syndrome accompanied by cynicism that can be found in many human services professionals (Gold & Roth, 2003). Career burnout can be portrayed in individuals who show a gradual digression of productivity due to motivation or validation challenges (Dennis, 2008). Burnout is rampant and usually influences the motivational factors of teachers resulting in noticeable classroom impact (Austin, Fernet, Guay, & Senecal, 2012).

Teacher burnout is a general concept that covers numerous qualities such as: stress, dissatisfaction with the profession, absenteeism, low professional interest and the desire to leave the occupation (DeJesus & Lens, 2006). Teachers who are more stressed out have proven to be additionally burned out (Faulk, Gloria, Jaggars & Steinhardt, 2011; Van Dick & Wagner, 2001). Exposure to stressors can induce physical symptoms and burnout in educators (Van Dick, et. al., 2001). Regardless of the various stressors that impact teacher burnout, it negatively influences the educator and his or her performance in the classroom, also assisting in manipulating students learning environments (Dennis, 2008).

Job burnout is a pervasive issue throughout the teaching profession (Aloe, Amo & Shanahan, 2013; Austin, Fernet, Guay, & Senecal, 2012; DeJesus & Lens 2006). Burnout syndrome is a psychosocial work-related disorder, caused by enduring stressful working conditions (Demarzo, Garcia-Campayo, Gascon, & Prado-Abril, 2014). The psychological relationship one has to his or her job can be viewed as a continuum between experiences of negativity through burnout and experiences of positivity through occupational engagement (Leiter & Maslach, 2008). Teacher burnout is often a result of the stress experienced in schools, and can be described as a extended exposure to

interpersonal and emotional stressors in the workplace, many times accompanied by inadequate recovery resulting in detachment from and indifference to ones work (Faulk, Gloria, Jaggars & Steinhardt, 2011). Educators who experience the effects of job burnout become unemotionally available to their students (Bradshaw, Hershfeldt, Leaf & Pas, 2010).

Job burnout has been a persistent and widespread phenomenon in society since it was first identified forty years ago as the way in which people react to work, which is reflected in their fatigue, cynicism and worth concerning their career (Bakker, Leiter & Maslach, 2014). In more recent decades, research involving educator burnout has classified several probable work environment and motivational elements tied to burnout in teachers (Austin, Fernet, Guay, & Senecal, 2012). Numerous people work in situations that are favorable to occupational burnout, some due to an overload in demands and lack of resources, others due to inadequate pay for hard labor and some because of an inability to understand the values of those making large decisions (Bakker, Leiter & Maslach, 2014).

Signs of moving towards a more severe stress-related state at work include disengagement, lack of performance, chronic fatigue, sleeping issues and lack of motivation for work related tasks (Danielsson, Heimerson, Lundberg, Perski, Stefansson, & Akerstedt, 2012). In the field of education, burnout frequently results in teachers feeling overwhelmed, withdrawing from student and work interactions, concerned less and regularly working to complete exhaustion (Crafford & Viljoen, 2013). Teacher burnout often encompasses depersonalization, which refers to cynical or negative attitudes towards ones students or colleagues; reduced personal accomplishment also

accompanies burnout, which involves feelings of no longer providing a meaningful and important service (Skaavik & Skaalvik, 2010). Job burnout has been linked to every stage of an educator's career and can affect not only various aspects of the profession, but the professional's willingness to continue pursuing the field of education (Aloe, Amo & Shanahan, 2013)

Consequences of Stress

Though the consequences of stress differ based on the individual, the signs and reaction to stress is similar in almost all people (Adams, Harlin, McKim & Rayfield, 2013; Selye, 1976). An individual's response to stress can be emotional, physical or physiological, which has effects on productivity and efficiency (Adams, et. al). Causes of teacher stress have proven to be interrelated and side effects of stressors can include bodily and emotional exhaustion, decreased social interaction and increased usage of sick leave (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

Various disciplines including education, psychology, social psychology and nursing have identified stress and coping as vital variables that impact ones health (Lyon, 2012). It is commonly accepted that stress impacts ones health, but the psychobiological connections are not understood, as they vary from person to person (Lyon, 2012). Prolonged stress invites a myriad of problems into the workplace (Danielsson, Heimerson, Lundberg, Perski, Stefansson & Akerstedt, 2012). Excessive job burdens, low job control, lack of administrative support and relational justice predict the occurrence of stress-related disorders (Bruinvels, Frings-Dresen, & Nieuwenhuijsen, 2010). General sensations associated with stress in people include: sleep issues, depression, appetite changes, heart pounding, fatigue, sweating and headaches (Lyon, 2012; Selye, 1976). Behavioral displays of stress are commonly seen in the forms of

caffeine or alcohol drinking, smoking and altered eating habits (Cartwright, Cooper, Donald, Johnson, Millet & Taylor, 2005; Lyon, 2012).

Fatigue, frustration, self-evaluation and isolation are results of stressors on the mind influencing specifically the emotional health of teachers (Fisher, 2011). Constant and sporadic stressors can negatively influence the psychological health of educators (Brown, Mahan, Mahan, Shelton & Weaver, 2010). Symptoms of depression and stress attribute to educator's motivation to continue in the profession (Green, 2014). The consequences related to high levels of stress in educators are evident in elevated depression and anxiety levels, increased physical complaints and more frequent use of drugs and alcohol (Crafford & Viljoen, 2013). Teachers have also reported an increased use of sick leave, sacrifice of social lives outside of school and early retirement as consequences of physical and emotional exhaustion in the profession (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

Educator stress is primarily viewed as a negative affect with varied psychological, behavioral and physiological correlations (Van Dick & Wagner, 2001). The impact of chronic stress on teachers influences the educator as an individual and the educational progression as a whole (Crafford & Viljoen, 2013). The detrimental effects of stress on educators can inspire society significantly when gifted professionals leave teaching due to health problems, fatigue and low morale (Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell & Wang, 2009). Stress unmanaged does not only affect the educator and his or her well-being; it impacts the potentially creative and supportive classroom environments that foster student learning developed by teachers (Beers, Jennings, Roeser & Skinner, 2012).

Coping with Stress

Sustaining and maintaining ones physical, emotional and social health is tremendously significant in alleviating day-to-day stressors for educators (Abenavoli, Greenburg,

Harris & Katz, 2013; Chen, Paquette & Rieg, 2007). Knowledge concerning the major stressors and symptoms of stress in educators is valuable in order to understand how to manage the factors that instigate stress for teachers (Chen & Miller, 1997; Chen, Paquette & Rieg, 2007; Crafford & Viljoen, 2013). Given the current trend of new teachers opting to not return to education as a career, identifying the factors related to stress and applicable coping mechanisms, are crucial components of maintaining an effective workforce (Chen, Paquette & Rieg, 2007). Specifically, preventative coping resources have been considered the most valuable in minimizing and offsetting stress; this form of coping involves self-efficacy and social connections found to assist in teacher well-being (Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell & Wang, 2009). Coping efforts can assist individuals in managing situations that may be stressful, that is, to diminish the perceived threat of demanding situations (Van Dick & Wagner, 2001).

Preventing stress-related diseases is possible through improvement to the psychosocial work environment (Brunivels, Frings-Dresen & Nieuwenhuijen, 2010). Professional development opportunities for educators that incorporate mindfulness training supports the social-emotional health and competence in teachers; it has proven to be a favorable method in preventing teacher burnout and supporting student learning environments (Abenavoli, Greenburg, Harris & Katz; 2013). However, stress management programs and workshops have also proven to cause additional stress in educators; therefore, school-based programs require specific attention to the perceived needs and interests of the teaching staff (Kipps-Vaughn, 2013).

When coping with stress, providing stress management opportunities for teachers to address specific needs creates a culture and environment of understanding that positively

impacts the education process (Kipps-Vaughn, 2013). If coping mechanisms are unsuitable, stress is the ultimate outcome; however, educators who acquire more adaptive coping strategies for their stress are less likely to suffer from burnout symptoms then educators who identified their primary coping strategies to be avoiding or ignoring problematic situations (Van Dick & Wagner, 2001).

Middle School Movement

At a speaking engagement in 1963, William Alexander first initiated the term "middle school" only seventeen years after the commonly practiced junior high schools were started; this is frequently distinguished as the beginning of the middle school movement (Lounsbury, 2009). Junior high schools were established in the early part of the twentieth century in order to operate as a transitional link between elementary and high schools; the middle school movement developed out of the concerns associated with the responsiveness to students in junior high schools (Alexander, 1974; Greene & McEwin, 2010; Lounsbury, 2009).

The middle school, in the United States, is the most common form in which to organize students in grades six through eight (Lounsbury, 2003). Each day, over twenty million rapidly changing and diverse youths aged ten to fifteen are enrolled in the middle level schools in the United States (National Middle School Association, 2003). The middle school movement emerged in the 1960's, which recognized a need for a unique approach to education when teaching students in early adolescence (Armstrong, 2006; National Middle School Association, 2003). The importance of tailoring the school organization and agendas to the needs of the students in this period of significant development was a primary component of the middle school movement (George, 2009; Loundsbury, 2009). A trademark of teaching middle school students included teachers

heterogeneously grouping (student grouping without consideration of the learner's ability) students in order to appeal to the intellectual development, emotional and social needs of middle grades students (Dickinson, 2001; George, 2009; Musoleno & White, 2010). The middle school movement allowed middle grades educators to improve the level of teacher quality while also redesigning curriculum from what had previously been nonspecific into a standards-based curriculum available to all members of the community (George, 2009).

When implemented properly, the middle school concept meets the needs of developing learners and flourishes (Alexander, 1974; Dickinson, 2001; Greene & McEwin, 2010; Lounsbury & Vars, 2003). Great levels of accomplishment have been achieved in terms of creating developmentally approachable middle level schools despite challenges along the way; the middle school concept has endured and still remains a valid model for organizing young adolescents schooling (Greene & McEwin, 2010). The middle school movement has similarly endorsed a caring, cutting-edge and effective group of teachers with skill sets geared toward the growth and development of the middle school learner (Lounsbury & Vars, 2003).

From other perspectives, many middle schools can be viewed as resting along a continuum of transitional middle school implementation, never truly utilizing all the pieces of the intended middle school concept (Dickinson, 2001; Greene & McEwin, 2010). Unfortunately, in many cases, middle schools were organized without careful planning of its programs, goals and evaluations but as administrative conveniences (Alexander, 1974). Rhetoric of the middle school movement can still be heard at the state and national levels, but the reality of its potential has not been brought to scale as

envisioned (Dickinson, 2001). Pessimism concerning the future of middle level

education is warranted when one contemplates the educational reform efforts that directly

contradict the exclusive characteristics, requirements and concerns of the young

adolescent (Lounsbury & Vars, 2003).

   Middle school students. Early adolescence is a phase of time in which students

experience rapid and substantial developmental changes (Anfara & Caskey, 2007;

Cappella, Kim & Schwartz, 2014; Lounsbury & Vars, 2003; National Middle School

Association, 2003). Young adolescents in the classroom are not only undergoing swift

physical growth, but are also being introduced to social pressures while developing moral

reasoning and abstract thinking simultaneously (Anfara & Caskey, 2007; George, 2009;

Lounsbury & Vars, 2003). The concept of middle school is as practical today as it was in

the early 1960's with the school based on the developmental needs of young adolescent

learners (Dickinson, 2001). The middle school concept is distinctive, accentuating the

whole student and educational practices that are to be incorporated across disciplines

(Brinegar, Malu, Reyes, Schaefer, Yoon, 2015). There is an emotional and social need for

middle school students to feel they are in a positive and safe environment in order for

learning to transpire (Radcliffe, 2015). Though there is a growing interest in exploring

the social context of middle schools and its impact on student adjustment, the information

available is generally narrow in scope (Cappella, Kim, Schwartz, 2014).

   During the period of early adolescence, students who attend public schools undergo a

transitional period when often academic performance declines and the social-emotional

needs of the student are tested (Anfara & Caskey, 2007; Cappella, Kim & Schwartz,

2014). Young adolescents are not only learning about themselves, but about personal

physical growth alongside the increasing interest in maintaining social skills (Musoleno & White, 2010). Middle school students are in a provisional period where opportunities for engagement in risky behaviors are available; middle school teachers, therefore, are in an exclusive situation where it becomes necessary to adopt techniques that will prevent students from participating in such behaviors (Bernard, King, Murnan, Nabors & Vidourek, 2011). For instance, middle school educators are encouraged to use instructional strategies such as grouping, while considering the developmental needs of the emerging adolescent as a technique for meaningful learning (Musoleno & White, 2010).

Middle schools. Middle schools as an entity have the predicament of not only meeting state mandates and maintaining high assessment scores, but also continuing the middle school concept that is devoted to educating and meeting the needs of the whole child and to guarantee all students experience individual growth (Anfara & Caskey, 2007; Musoleno & White, 2010). Goals of the middle school include providing an enhanced schooling for children as a bridge between elementary and high school in order to facilitate continuous evolvement in education (Alexander, 1974).

Middle school is a time in which students investigate their strengths, interests and hobbies; this encompasses offering assorted extracurricular activities for students to explore safely their interests while also providing successful opportunities for those students who have difficulty academically in school (Conderman, Kackar-Cam, Neto, & Walker, 2013). Overall, the school-level stress enhanced by teachers' experiences and perceptions should all be considered in various combinations as potential influences on middle grades students' experiences (Cappella, Kim & Schwartz, 2014). It has been

stated that teacher preparation programs should incorporate larger portions of knowledge dedicated to the maturation process of the middle school years due to the large impact it has on students' educational experiences (Black, 2011).

Middle school educator stress. Educators of the middle grades, while working bravely and collaboratively with other stakeholders, can transform middle level schools in ways that benefit adolescents (Greene & McEwin, 2010). Many teachers enter the profession with the intention of reaching as many students as possible; teaching in the middle grades, however, involves reaching students while addressing the inevitable emotional and physical changes experienced by the adolescent student (Black, 2011). Schools that are successful with early adolescents are depicted by a culture that contains educators who value and are prepared to work with this age group (National Middle School Association, 2003). Middle school educators face distinctive challenges in addressing the intellectual needs of students because they must also carefully consider the social, emotional, psychological, moral and ethical developmental stages unique to this age group (Anfara & Caskey, 2007; National Middle School Association, 2003). All classrooms can be considered active social systems; the middle school classroom is distinctive due to the complex interactions among peers as well as between the educator and his or her students (Radcliffe, 2015). Ultimately, what the middle grades process of education imparts on young adolescents is more likely to have an ongoing impact on students then the actual curriculum content (Lounsbury, 2009).

Educators in the middle school classroom must have an understanding that the biological changes in the students have an impression on the social, emotional and cognitive processes of early teens learning (Armstrong, 2006; Brinegar, Malu, Reyes,

Schaefer, Yoon, 2015). A task exclusive to middle grades teachers is that they support moving students from childhood dependency to a relative adolescent independence through classroom opportunities (Radcliffe, 2015). Teachers in the middle grades are expected to not only relate to their classroom of students, but to also adjust daily instruction to meet the needs of the developing adolescent (Ankara & Caskey 2007, Haverback, Mee & Passe, 2012; Musoleno & White, 2010; National Middle School Association, 2003). However, it should be noted that teaching and maintaining rigorous curriculum that is standards-based is not mutually exclusive from supporting the needs of young adolescent (Radcliffe, 2015).

In addition to mandatory standardized testing as a stressor, middle grades teachers deal with exceptional trials to adolescent learning such as struggling readers in a classroom with less instructional time due to standardized test preparation (Moreau, 2014; Musoleno & White, 2010). During adolescence, students start to simultaneously develop essential skills and experience literacy challenges due to the requirement to master literary practices unique to the diverse disciplines, texts and situations present in middle school (NCTE, 2007). Middle grades teachers have an overall belief that the students they teach should be competent in reading at their grade level, however, educators struggle with identifying how to adapt curriculum to the student's needs and face the reality that reading skills need to be improved significantly (Moreau, 2014). In addition, when adolescents are not acknowledged for generating valuable, multiple-literacy practices in the classroom, they can become resistant to school-based literacy (NCTE, 2007). Teachers struggle to balance the demands of assessment while also adequately meeting the needs of young adolescents learning in the classroom (Musoleno

& White, 2010). Due to the challenges that exist when working with adolescents daily, it is critical that teachers sense support in order to reduce stress among educators (Kipps-Vaughn, 2013).

Research regarding middle grades education and the middle school concept is still a relatively new and unexplored field of study (Brinegar, Malu, Reyes, Schaefer, Yoon, 2015; Dickinson, 2001). As a breakthrough study for the field, Teresa McIntyre (University of Houston) was awarded a research grant to investigate the unexplored topic of middle grades teacher stress through a longitudinal, mixed methods study which is currently underway (McIntyre, 2011). This study is anticipated to address predictors and job stress outcomes in middle school teachers, linking teacher stressors to teacher effectiveness and student behavior and achievement for the duration of four years (McIntyre, 2011). Furthermore, the purpose of this investigatory study is to guide future interventions to alleviate educator stress and improve the overall classroom environment in terms of the teacher and the student (McIntyre, 2011).

Though there is a gap in the literature in terms of why teachers choose to pursue middle grades education, this collection of teachers has a commitment that is unique to the adolescent learner (Haverback & Mee, 2014) Teachers claim to have chosen middle grades education because they can relate to young adolescents and believe they can positively influence the lives of students through a subject area (Haverback & Mee, 2014; National Middle School Association, 2003). Understanding and acknowledging the exclusive developmental characteristics of students in early adolescence and their connection to the educational program and structure of the middle school are all central principles of what is involved in middle grades education (Anfara & Caskey, 2007).

Middle school teachers hold the fundamental piece to the very best influential

opportunity, not only to the future of adolescent individuals but to make the crucial

difference in society itself (Lounsbury & Vars, 2003).

Professional Teaching Experience

Learning is a major part of human adaptation, occurring in all social settings and can

be considered the process by which knowledge is crafted through the transformation of

experience (Kolb, 1984). John Dewey, Jean Piaget and Kurt Lewin in various modes

emphasize the significance of experience throughout the learning process, specifically

personal experience, which makes abstract concepts comprehensible and practical (Kolb,

1984).

Several professions distinguish employees' years of experience as a substantial factor

in human resource choices regarding benefits, compensation and promotional decisions;

the idea is supported that experience, added over time, enhances the knowledge,

productivity and skills of personnel (Rice, 2010). Education as a profession, is one of the

few which supports responsibility equality for both the novice teacher and a seasonally

experienced classroom teacher (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). Teacher experience is

possibly the key factor that impacts current employees, as it is a building block for salary

schedules and prioritizes transfer and promotion policies in schools (Rice, 2010).

The field of education has a challenge of maintaining highly qualified professionals in

the classroom (Battle, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000;

Steffy, 2000). It has been recorded that as many as one quarter of new educators in the

United States abandon the profession within three years (Martin, Sass & Schmitt, 2012).

The individual distinctions among educators contribute to their reflections on their first

year in the profession; some report motivation while others note stress as a key factor that

impacted their experience (Dunham, 2002). It has also been noted that teachers experience less negative emotion as teaching experience accumulates (Beers, 2012; Green 2014).

New educators often struggle during the first year of teaching with challenges that frequently lead to deserting the profession (Standbury & Zimmerman, 2000; Steffy, 2000; Tait, 2008). In many schools, inexperienced and young educators are assigned the most challenging classes to teach (Darling-Hammond, 2010; DeJesus & Lens, 2006). Beginning educators are particularly vulnerable when it comes to dealing with stress that accompanies inexperienced teaching (Beers, 2012; Stansbury, et. al., 2000). Traditionally and alternatively certified educators acknowledged the greatest need for their in-service training to be professional development related to the management of work-related stress (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Lambert, Torres & Tummons, 2012).

In a longitudinal national study conducted by the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) of beginning school teachers who started their careers during the 2007-2008 school term, ten percent did not return to teaching in 2008-2009, twelve percent did not return to teaching in 2009-2010, fifteen percent did not teach in 2010-2011 and seventeen percent did not return to teaching for the 2011-2012 school term (Grey & Taie, 2015). In a later study of novice public school teachers (with between one and three years of experience) in 2012-2013, seven percent left the teaching profession to pursue other interests (NCES, 2014).

Assumptions may be made about new educators being more stressed, but in separate studies, Chan, Chen & Chong (2010) and Fisher (2011) found no significant difference between the levels of stress in beginning teachers as opposed to more experienced

educators. Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2015) concluded that perceived causes of stress and job satisfaction is consistent for all educators, regardless of years of experience or age.

With these conflicting findings, experience, beyond the first few years of teaching, has been said to be an irrelevant factor in predicting productivity in educators due to new teachers often having more energy than veteran educators, though this could simply be due to burnout in the profession (Rice, 2010). All teachers require support; newer educators may benefit from mentoring and lesson plan assistance whereas veteran educators may benefit from burnout prevention techniques and preparation for school leadership positions (Lambert, McCarthy & Reiser, 2014; Stukes, 2015).

Phases of the Career Teacher

Through a growing body of literature, it has been suggested that the career of a lifetime educator can be broken down into several phases or stages which make up a career cycle (Eros, 2011). By means of an advocacy model, known as the *Life Cycle of the Career Teacher* phase model, it is understood that teachers must advance through progressive phases in order to maintain excellence throughout an entire career (Steffy, 2000). Though it is noted that the life cycle phases of a teacher depend upon variables such as adequate preparation, school context, support systems and individual characteristics, the overall progression through the various phases applies to career teachers (Eros, 2011; Steffy, 2000). In this developmental model, there are six phases, which are identified in ascending order as the following: novice, apprentice, professional, expert, distinguished and emeritus (Steffy, 2000). The novice phase marks the beginning of the teaching process while the apprentice stage applies to the phase when educators learn how to attain high ideals for their teaching practice (Steffy, 2000). The professional stage characterizes teachers who recognize the essential nature of reflection time, and

represents a majority of educators in the profession, while the expert stage embodies a phase of teaching which focuses on actively unlocking the learning process for students (Steffy, 2000). The distinguished phase gives credit to educators who actively seek to impact the policies of the field and emeritus refers to educators who have completed the life cycle stages, have retired and now give back to the system of education in some capacity (Steffy, 2000). This model highlights the process of how individuals grow continually and become more proficient career teachers along the life cycle phase continuum (Steffy, 2000). It should be noted that individuals move along the ongoing continuum at different rates throughout their career teaching cycle (Steffy, 2000).

The major research studies relating to (1) teacher stress, (2) teacher phase of classroom experience and (3) culminating topics related to middle grades educator stress and years of phase of classroom teacher experience can be found in the charts below.

Studies Related to Teacher Stress

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
Abernavoli, Greenberg, Harris & Katz (2013)	Explore the physiological and self-reported measures of stress in middle school teachers	30 middle school educators in two middle schools in one county in the United States	<u>Quantitative</u>: physiological data collection (saliva samples to regulate cortisol levels) in the fall and spring <u>Quantitative</u> self-reported questionnaires: MBI (burnout), Perceived Stress Scale, ERQ (emotional), GAD-7 (anxiety), PHQ (depression) and time urgency Short term longitudinal study Descriptive statistics	• Perceived stress scale scores in the fall had no association with physiological measures in terms of increased stress • Salivary stress markers have a modest relationship to self-reported data • Salivary stress markers are not predictive of self-reported stress or burnout in the spring
Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell & Wang (2009)	Explore elementary school teacher stress and coping in the classroom related to classroom resources and demands	521 elementary school educators working in 16 elementary schools in one county in an urban state in America	<u>Quantitative</u>: self-reported questionnaires: CARD (stress) survey, MBI (burnout), GHQ (health), SQ (teacher stress), self-efficacy and self-critical attitude Descriptive statistics	• CARD scale scores were not correlated with any GHQ score • Moderately strong associations were indicated in CARD scale and MBI scale scores • Low relationship between classroom resources and demands

Studies Related to Educator's Phase of Experience in the Classroom

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES

Beers (2012)	Examine how teachers at different stages of their career deal and cope with professional demands and stressors	60 teachers employed in grades 4-12 in Canada Early Career: (1-8 years of experience) Middle Career: (9-19 years of experience) Late Career: (20+ years of experience)	Qualitative: Open-ended interviews Randomized waitlist control study Quantitative: After coding interview data, descriptive statistics were utilized	• Early career teacher mentioned environment as stressful more often than other groups • Late career teachers mentioned students more often as a stressor and parents much less than other groups • As educators gain experience, focus is placed more on the demands presented by students, but other demands were less of a burden • Teachers experience less negative emotions as teacher experience is gained
Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2015)	Explore work-related stress, job satisfaction, consequences of stress and coping strategies of teachers at various stages in their professional careers	30 current and 4 retired elementary or middle school teachers in Norway Young Teachers: 27-34 years old) Middle-Aged: (35-50 years old) Senior teacher: (51-63 years old)	Qualitative: 60-90 minute open-ended interviews	• All age groups of teachers experienced high stress and had severe emotional and physical exhaustion • All age groups dealt with work stress differently • All teachers reported high job satisfaction driven by intrinsic motivation • Stress was found to be related to school-based factors
Chan, Chen &	Investigate work-related	1710 teachers in Hong Kong	Quantitative: Self-reported	• No significant finding was noted in

Studies Related to Teacher Stress and Phase of Experience in the Classroom

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES

Fisher (2011)	Explore teacher stress and burnout as it relates to years of professional experience	385 Advanced Placement (AP) secondary level educators Novice teachers (up to five years of experience) Veteran teachers (greater than five years of experience)	Quantitative: surveys Descriptive Statistics	ANOVA test results: • Slightly higher burnout scores for novice teachers • No significant difference between stress scores of novice and veteran teachers CARD (stress) survey: skewness and kurtosis were within normal ranges MBI (burnout) survey: no reportable skewness or kurtosis found in the variable PRI (stress prevention) survey: no significant skewness or kurtosis
Stukes (2015)	Explore novice and veteran elementary teacher's perceptions of stress and attitudes toward the teaching profession	Twelve novice or veteran elementary teachers K-4 in Tennessee Novice teachers: (up to five years of experience) Veteran teachers: (greater than five years of experience)	Qualitative: interviews and focus groups	Teachers of the novice and veteran teacher groups had common stressors: lack of time and resources, accountability policies, academic and behavioral needs Overall teachers were satisfied with the teaching profession though there are many stressors
McIntyre (2011) (manuscript in process)	Explore teacher stress and the potential influence it has on teacher effectiveness, student behavior and learning	202 seventh and eighth grade social studies, science or math teachers from 22 urban middle schools	Qualitative: observational ratings, blood pressure and heart rate monitoring	Outcomes not yet recorded

Summary

Stress has proven to be a notable influence on the human condition. Since the

discovery of stress by Hans Selye in 1946, numerous occupations have researched its

components as it applies to work-related stress. Teaching is no exception to this research.

The strenuous and extensive personal and contractual responsibilities to the profession

have made it a notable area of investigation internationally. Specific stressors related to

teaching are incredibly similar in varying parts of the world. Personal responsibility,

managing student behavior, attending to diverse learning needs, school setting issues,

workload and accountability polices, administrative issues, parents of students and the

balance between personal and professional issues are a few of the stressors specific to the

teaching profession. An educator is more prone to decreased job satisfaction and career

burnout when perceived stress is evident. The consequences of stress impact the

cognitive, physical, psychological and emotional states of educators. Learning to

effectively cope with the stressors present in the workplace is essential in order to maintain healthy functioning. In the middle school classroom, these stressors are amplified in educators due to the added demand of attending to the unique physical and emotional needs of adolescents. In addition, the career teacher phase an educator relates to in the classroom could potentially impact the way in which stressors influence daily educational practices.

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

International interest in the problem of teacher stress has been notably researched in the field of education. Educator stress has proven to be widespread and is largely represented by quantitative data which hones in on elementary and secondary teachers, leaving very little research with a focus on the stress relevant to middle grades educators. Investigation regarding middle grades educator stress was crucial due to the prospective influence the results of this study could have on teacher morale, overall school environment, educator well-being and student achievement. The additional factor of teacher career phase, as it could potentially relate to middle grades educator stress, was also investigated because of the lack of focus on this relationship in previous literature.

The researcher utilized the sequential exploratory mixed methods (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009) study approach to collect data and information regarding middle grades stressors in varying teacher career phases. The *Phases of the Career Teacher Life Cycle* Model (Steffy, 2000) served as a reference in this study and also to participants in terms of how they would classify their current career phase. This was also a descriptive research study because its aim was to collect information on a particular phenomenon (middle grades educator stress), and describe important factors associated with this phenomena at a single point in time (Brown, Clark, Kelley & Sitzia, 2003). The population of focus involved active middle grades teachers in the State of Georgia who currently teach in grades 6-8. To initiate the study, approximately eight to ten middle grades teachers were interviewed in a focus group with the intention of gathering detailed qualitative data underlining the primary stressors experienced by middle school teachers.

Seven active educators and one active middle school counselor participated in the focus group. Participants were also asked to identify with one of the career phases in the life cycle model. The developmental, progressive advocacy model has six phases: *novice*, *apprentice*, *professional*, *expert*, *distinguished* and *emeritus*. Two participants identified with the *apprentice* phase, and the remaining six identified with the *professional*, *expert* or *distinguished* teacher phase. Following the transcription of the collected interview data, the researcher analyzed and classified notable themes found in the narrative data provided by participants. Particularly, the researcher focused on the top stressors impacting middle grades educators in the workplace, as identified in the research questions.

After synthesizing the collected data, the top stressors identified by the participants during the focus group process became pertinent points of interest for the researcher and were analyzed for consensus. Then, by means of a quantitative paper-based survey a large group of middle grades educators were asked to review the list of top stressors and rank them by order of relevance to their experiences with stress in the middle grades classroom. This survey additionally included a question asking the participants which teacher career phase currently described their position as an educator.

After this process, the researcher recorded and analyzed the narrative and numeric data. The qualitative information from the focus group in addition to the quantitative data from the paper-based survey provided the researcher with information necessary to answer the research questions. As a true sequential exploratory mixed methods study, the quantitative component was contingent upon the qualitative data collection and analyzation, and the qualitative data collection phase had to precede the quantitative data

collection (Creswell, 2009). The additional factor required to answer the research questions were requested of participants when they categorized the career phase that best depicted their current position. The researcher used this teacher career phase data to answer the research questions pertaining to the extent to which there is a relationship between middle grades educator stress and teacher career phase.

The mixed method study approach was the best means of gathering relevant information pertaining to the extent to which there is a relationship between middle grades educator stress and teacher career phase. The qualitative element of this study alowed educators of diverse backgrounds to provide significant and personal input regarding their expertise in dealing with specific stressors of the middle grades classroom. The sequential nature of the study permitted the quantitative element to build upon the qualitative data collection (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009) concerning the most commonly reported stressors in the classroom for middle grades teachers. A well-rounded research approach was utilized in order to answer the research questions regarding the extent to which there is a relationship between middle grades educator stress and teacher career phase.

In this chapter, the researcher will hone in on the research questions and purpose for choosing the mixed methods study design. The methodology will be detailed by descriptions of the population, participants, sample and instrumentation intended for use throughout the proposed study. Validation and data collection methods will be explored in addition to the expected response rate, anticipated data analysis techniques and reporting of the data.

Research Questions

The research questions used to guide the study were created with the following

essential variables as areas of focus: a) middle grades educator stress and b) phases of the

career teacher. The research questions are as follows:

1) What stressors are present in the work-place for middle grades educators?

2) How do middle school educator stressors compare based on the career phase of

   the teacher?

3) To what extent is there a relationship between middle grades educator stress and

   phases of the career teacher?

Research Design

The following design can be defined as a descriptive study, because of the focus on

specific parameters in a population (middle grades educator stressors), in addition to the

attention placed on a descriptive association (middle grades educator stressors as they

could potentially be related to teacher career phase) (Brown, Clark, Kelley & Sitzia,

2003). To begin this research study, a qualitative interview protocol was developed with

the intent of answering the research questions and for use in a focus group. A focus group

is an interactive setting designed to engage discussion in response to a moderator's

questions with the purpose of gathering data from expert groups concerning their

perceptions of a particular concept (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). The researcher

employed a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix G) which used the interview

questions and protocol as a guide, but ultimately allowed the interviewee to determine the

process and structure once they began describing their experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012).

In this case, the concept of investigation was middle grades educator stressors, and

middle grades teachers were the participants asked about the concept of work-related

stress. Participants were asked to sign a consent form regarding participation in the focus group or survey (see Appendix A and B). The participating school administrators assisted in guiding the researcher to willing middle grades educator participants (see Appendices C and D). The researcher asked that the school administrators consider teachers of varying grades levels (6-8), areas of expertise and years of teaching experience during the selection process. The participants were also asked to identify the career phase (see Appendix E) which most closely resonates with their current position during the focus group and survey process.

The qualitative data was collected and documented with a recording device that had a password only known to the researcher. The data was then transcribed from the focus group, analyzed and used to create a survey of the top middle grades educator stressors as outlined in the themes found from the focus group. A quantitative, paper-based survey, developed from the qualitative data, was then given to another, larger group of active middle grades educators. The survey participants were asked to rank the top stressors (as identified in the focus group) based upon their experiences with workplace stress. In addition, teachers were asked to classify the teacher career phase which currently resonated with their position in the career. Once this data was collected, both from the focus group and survey, the researcher evaluated the data with the intention of answering the research questions. The culmination of the qualitative data collection informing the quantitative data assisted in providing quality answers to the identified research questions.

A sequential mixed methods research design for acquiring data was chosen because of the applicable nature this technique provided in adequately answering the research

questions. A sequential mixed methods design acknowledges that the qualitative data must be collected in order to inform the quantitative data collection (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). Additionally, a mixed methods research design supported the compatibility thesis, which embraces the integration of both qualitative and quantitative components used during the implementation of a research study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). Neither qualitative nor quantitative methods individually would have adequately answered the research questions. Pragmatism, the philosophical partner of mixed methods, offers an opportunity to include ideas gathered from vast and multiple perspectives as it relates to research questions and real-world circumstances (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). A pragmatic perspective, as it relates to educational research, can assist educators and researchers in becoming more reflective and thoughtful about educational goals (Badley, 2003).

The qualitative component of this study permitted conversation with multiple middle grades educators, from varying backgrounds and levels of experience in reference to stress. The semi-structured focus group allowed for authentic educator experiences to be described, in a flexible environment. This method allowed the researcher to better understand the actively relevant stressors middle grades educators face in the workplace from various perspectives. Qualitative data collection also endorsed open-ended questions, which generated authenticity and meaningful personal experiences of participants. Through the use of In Vivo coding, which included codes generated from the participant as opposed to the researcher (Saldana, 2016), the voice of the participating educators was conserved. Lastly, theme development was a unique quality of the qualitative data collection method. But, if solely qualitative methods were utilized to

conduct this study, a lack of measurable data would have been noticeable regarding middle grades educator stressors and the career phase to which they currently relate.

The quantitative component of data collection and analyzation was essential to the success of this study because of the relationships that can be identified between factors and relating variables. The closed-ended quality of the quantitative paper-based surveys gave the researcher an opportunity to use numerical data to draw conclusions. However, if the researcher were to solely focus on quantitative methods to conduct this study, there would have be bias on behalf of the researcher in terms of relevant stressors in addition to a lack of meaningful interaction with current educators. The researcher could have potentially held opinions due to the pertinent experience as a middle grades educator who experienced stressors.

The goal of the researcher was to employ a well-rounded approach including both narrative and numeric data with pertinent input from practicing educators. A mixed method study allowed the researcher to draw inferences from two varying facets of the middle grades educator stress phenomenon. Using a mixed methods research approach allowed for a more complete and accurate understanding of the research questions. The authentic qualitative experiences, and semi-structured focus group format aided in explaining and enhancing the quantitative results of the research.

The mixed methods technique which best represents this research study is the sequential exploratory strategy. The sequential exploratory method involved first collecting and analyzing qualitative data, followed by collecting and analyzing quantitative data, which built upon the results collected in the first qualitative phase of data collection (Creswell, 2009). Emphasis is typically geared toward the first phase of

qualitative data collection, and the data becomes mixed through the connection of qualitative data analysis and quantitative data collection (Creswell, 2009). Visual representation of the sequential exploratory design method of data collection is represented in Figure 1.
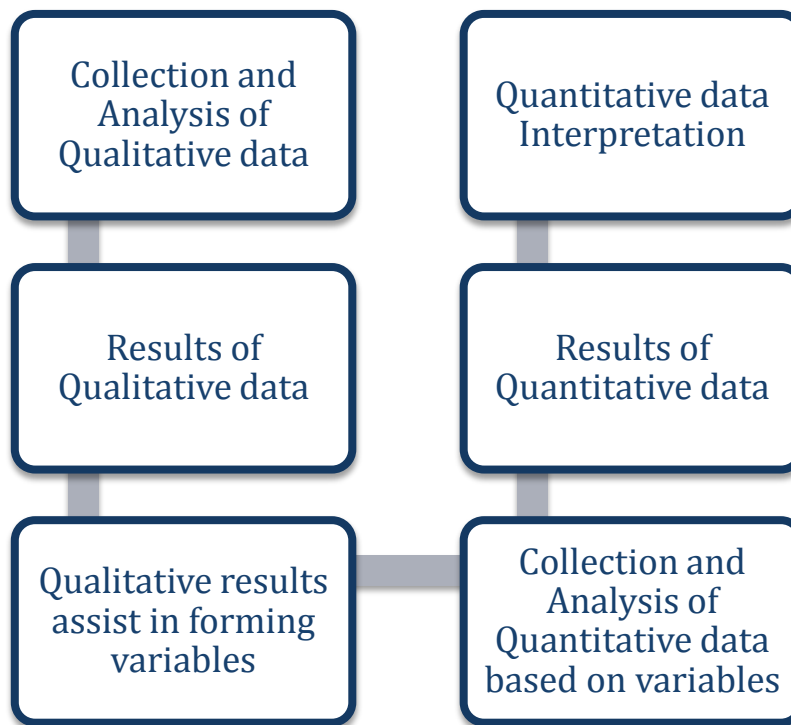
Figure 1: Sequential Exploratory Design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009)

The procedures of this research study will follow the sequential exploratory design. The beginning step of the research process involved collecting qualitative data through a semi-structured focus group with middle grades educators. The educator participants were chosen with the help of school administrators, with consideration given to teachers of different grade levels (6-8), and varying areas of content knowledge and years of educator experience. After the focus group session was imparted, the researcher analyzed and determined results (the top stressors of middle grades educators) as identified by the focus group. The input from the qualitative data collection informed the researcher as

how to proceed in creating the quantitative, paper-based survey intended for a different

group of middle grades educators. The middle grades educators who participated in this

portion of the study were from a consenting school district in Georgia who agreed to

participate. This purposeful sampling (Hays & Singh, 2012) required selected individuals

to be middle grades educators (grades 6-8) in the State of Georgia. This survey also

added the component of teacher career phase. Once the quantitative surveys were created,

returned and data was collected, the researcher analyzed the quantitative feedback

gleaned from the middle grades educators concerning stress and teacher career phase.

Lastly, the results of the numeric quantitative data were interpreted by the researcher

along with the narrative qualitative data in order to best answer the identified research

questions.

Research Confirmation Table

Research Question	Instrumentation/ Analysis	How will strategy answer the research question?
1-What stressors are present in the work-place for middle grades educators?	QUAL semi-structured focus group	Narrative data from the QUAL focus group provided thematic stressors found in the work-place for middle grades educators
2-How do middle school educator stressors compare based on the career phase of the teacher?	QUAN paper-based survey	Numeric data from QUAN surveys provided information regarding stressors in educators at various career phases
3-To what extent is there a relationship between middle grades educator stress and phases of the career teacher?	Sequential mixed data analysis QUAL $\rightarrow$ QUAN (QUAN data is dependent upon QUAL data)	The explicit stressors were addressed in the QUAL focus group, then the survey provided QUAN data to confirm middle grades educator stressors/career phase data

Population

The population refers to the entirety of all components within a particular boundary

involving both detailed and well-defined characteristics (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009).

The population consisted of middle grades educators in the State of Georgia who currently serve as teachers in grades 6-8. Approximately eight to ten middle grades teachers, identified with the help of school administrators based on varying grade level experience, content area expertise and professional teaching experience, were asked to participate in a semi-structured focus group in order to generate narrative data needed for the quantitative surveys. A larger population of middle grades educators were identified to participate in the quantitative paper-based survey with the intent of generating numeric data from the responses. These educators were selected based upon the school district's willingness to participate in the study, and the purposeful sampling (Hays & Singh, 2012) criteria of currently serving as a middle grades educator. The added component of teacher career phase will also be surveyed. The larger population of educators identified to participate in the quantitative data collection provided a more representative sample with greater confidence regarding generalizing the results of this study. The unit of analysis, middle grades educator stressors, was the focus of all the mixed method data collection methods. The sequential mixed methods sampling method was implemented with the middle grades educator population, with the data from the qualitative focus groups informing the quantitative survey content.

The population of practicing middle grades educators was the group providing answers to the identified research questions. This was the best possible population to answer the research questions because of their practical, recent and applicable experience with stressors in the middle grades classroom. Due to the high volume of teacher stress research regarding elementary and secondary educators, these practitioners were not be considered in the data collection process. The lack of literature regarding middle grades

educator stressors made these educators the best possible population to answer the research questions.

Participants

The participants in this study were active middle grades educators who were chosen based on their unique perspectives about stressors in the middle grades classrooms. The participants were chosen based upon their common denominator as current middle grades educators (grades 6-8). The focus group participants for the qualitative portion of the study were chosen with the help of school leadership at one middle school with the criteria being: varying 6-8 grade classroom teachers, diverse areas of content expertise and dissimilar classroom experience. The participants were selected for the quantitative paper-based survey based upon the school districts' willingness to participate in the study, and current service as a 6-8 grade teacher in a single middle school. These participants were willing to participate due to the potential influence this study could have on governing bodies concerning middle grades educator stressors at various career phases. Though it was difficult to determine the extent to which there was a relationship between middle grades educator stressors and teacher career phases, the stressors reported by active middle grades educators provided insight into the teaching and learning environments of middle grades educators. The participants were willing to respond to survey questions based on their curiosity, comradery in desiring better understanding of educators in their same situation and opportunity to provide a voice to the issue of stress in the profession.

Sample

The sequential mixed methods sampling technique was used to sample the population. Sequential mixed method sampling involved selecting analysis units through the

sequential use of probability and purposive sampling strategies (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). Purposeful sampling refers to establishing clear criteria concerning the sampled population prior to investigation (Hays & Singh, 2012), in this case currently serving as a 6-8 grade educator. Specifically, convenience sampling, as a representativeness of sample strategy was utilized, which is a technique used based upon the researcher's access to a given population (Hays & Singh, 2012). Within the sequential mixed method sampling technique, the information obtained through the qualitative components of data collection was required in order to determine the quantitative components.

As the qualitative sampling of the study, administrators in the school were asked to assist in selecting middle grades educators to participate in an hour-long focus group at the beginning of the research study. Administrative leaders in the school were requested to help find participants who were teachers currently serving in various grade levels (6-8), with diverse content area knowledge and varying years of classroom experience. The semistructured focus group used the researcher-developed qualitative interview protocol to discuss the range of educator experiences with stress and also their current career phase. This nonrandom and purposeful sampling procedure allowed individuals with expertise to address the research questions with the overall intent being to provide narrative data to the researcher by which quantitative data was then generated. The researcher then used the results of the focus group data to design a quantitative, paper-based survey, which was given to another larger sample of middle grades educators in the same middle school. The researcher used the quantitative probability sampling technique to survey a larger number of middle grades educators in Georgia regarding stressors and teacher career phase. The larger sample size of middle grades educators, chosen to

participate in the quantitative survey, based upon school district willingness to participate and criteria of a current middle grades educator (grades 6-8), assisted in establishing representativeness for the study. The quantitative probability sampling both helped generalize and validate the findings of the study.

Instrumentation

Focus group. A focus group is known as a strategy for data collection, which occurs in a collaborative interview setting with a limited number of contributors responding openly to questions from a moderator (Hays & Singh, 2012; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). A semi-structured focus group was first conducted in this study to collect data to inform the quantitative portion of the study. A semi-structured focus group, as a form of discussion, allowed the interviewer to veer from the structured interview questions in order to capture the authenticity and detail of the interviewees experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012). The focus group, guided by an interview protocol (Hays & Singh, 2012), discussed the wide range of stressors, which impacted their work as middle grades educators, and also their current teacher career phase. The researcher guided the discussion with hopes of answering the identified research questions. This qualitative focus group data was imperative in guiding the formulation of thematic data to inform the quantitative surveys.

Quantitative paper-based survey technique. Quantitative research surveys, as means for collecting data, is a systematic method used with the intention of predicting attributes of a population (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). Typically, in survey research, preset questions are offered to a representative sample of the given population (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). A survey most commonly refers to a sample of people from a pre-determined population of interest who participate in providing the researcher with a small amount of data (Brown, Clark, Kelley & Sitzia, 2003). The technique of survey research

is used with the purpose of gathering information from individuals in order to make some inference about the larger population (Brown, Clark, Kelley & Sitzia, 2003). In this study, the best information was obtained from the knowledge of experts in the field of middle grades education through a survey which increases the likelihood of a representative sample (Brown, Clark, Kelley & Sitzia, 2003). A paper-based survey was utilized as opposed to an online survey due to the increased response rate associated with paper-based survey administration (Nulty, 2008).

Integration of thematic and statistical data analysis

The QUAL → QUAN sequential mixed data analysis design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009) includes first the exploration of statements obtained in the focus group, which will result in thematic stressors for middle grades educators. The narrative data collected from the focus group was coded using In Vivo Coding, which utilized the participant's direct language as coding, as opposed to researcher-developed codes (Saldana, 2016). The emergent themes were revealed after the coding process took place. Then, the emergent themes were formulated into a quantitative closed-ended survey, which was distributed to a larger group of middle grades educators. The added component of teacher career phase was also a portion of the survey. The quantitative data gathered provided the researcher with the phase of career the educator currently relates to and also the top stressors in their middle grades education career experience.

Validation

The qualitative semi-structured focus group protocol was developed with the intention of capturing pertinent and authentic information from middle grades teachers, which can adequately answer the research questions. The participants, as middle grades educators, contributed recommendations in terms of the top stressors in the work-place for middle

grades educators. The opinions and recommendations of participants were incorporated into the quantitative portion of the study as validated opinions of current middle grades educator's stressors.

Inference quality; inference transferability

The quantitative strategy of a paper-based survey was implemented by the researcher following the collection of qualitative data. After this implementation, the researcher evaluated both the transferability (found in the qualitative findings) and the external validity (found in the quantitative findings) of this mixed methods study, by determining the extent to which findings can be applied to other contexts and settings (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009).

Data collection

Sequential mixed data analysis. The data collection methodology first included, through sequential mixed data collection, a qualitative semistructured focus group which was in the form of narrative data collected by the researcher. The semistructured focus group involved researcher-developed inquiries and probes concerning work-place stressors for middle grades educators and participant career phase, but also allowed flexibility for interviewees to have more of a understood voice in the process (Hays & Singh, 2012). This data was transcribed and then analyzed for reoccurring themes using In Vivo Coding, which utilizes the language of the participants as codes instead of researcher-developed codes (Saldana, 2016) in terms of the top stressors for middle grades educators. Once the data was gathered concerning the top stressors, it was turned into a researcher-developed quantitative survey. This survey included a question pertaining to the participant's current career phase. This quantitative survey was administered with the intent of middle grades educators identifying the stressors based

upon their relevance to work stress, to eventually determine answers to the research questions. Sequential data analysis was performed when the themes gathered from the qualitative focus group data strand were used for comparison with the data collected from the quantitative survey (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009).

Response rate

The qualitative focus group of experts were asked to participate in the study, but the researcher understands that the potential of participants not following through with the focus group is inevitable, and therefore anticipated the response rate of 50% (Nulty, 2008) from these participants. This implies that some of the focus group participants did not provide data for collection.

The quantitative technique of paper-based surveys has proven to be an adequate method of measuring expert opinion instead of online survey administration because of the increased response rates associated with its implementation (Bryant, Gilmartin & Sax, 2003; Nulty, 2008). In faculty response surveys, response rates ranging from 23% to 92% are reported in the literature (Ha, Jones & Marsh, 1998); however, typically a survey response rate of 50% is reported (Avery, Bell, Bryant, Kang & Mathios, 2006). It has also been reported that when survey participants are professionals, the response rate is greater with a paper-based mode of administration (Bryant, et. al. 2003). Therefore, the researcher would like to aim for a 50% response rate in collecting the quantitative paper-based surveys.

Data Analysis

In the qualitative semistructured focus group, the researcher-developed interview protocol was used in an attempt to probe participants about their experiences with stressors and their current career phase, while also allowing the interviewees to be honest

and authentic about their experiences. The data from the focus group was transcribed

after its collection and recording with the researcher, and then thematic data analysis

occurred. The In Vivo Coding method (Saldana, 2016) was used on the data collected and

themes were identified based upon the coded data. The top coded themes (of middle

grades educator stressors from the data) were the premise which guided the quantitative

paper-based survey development.

The quantitative paper-based survey technique, as a means of expanding the

qualitative research findings, was used with middle grades educators to assist in

identifying top stressors among middle grades educators. The data collection from the

survey was analyzed in hopes of answering the research questions. The quantitative

paper-based survey studies was analyzed using the collected statistical data to measure

the central tendency for the average scores of each of the survey questions. The most

common central tendency indicators are the mean, median and the mode (Airasian, Mills,

& Gay; 2011). In the current study, the mean determined the average of each of the

ranked questions and the mode provided the most frequently occurring value for each of

the ranked questions (Airasian, et. al, 2011). The mode was also used to determine the

most frequently occurring responses, as it relates to survey questions concerning the

phase of the teaching career and top stressors identified for middle grades educators.

Reporting the data

When using the sequential mixed methods form of data collection and reporting, the

qualitative data was reported in order to inform the quantitative data collection. The

initial narrative data collected during the focus group was reported in a narrative,

Discussion of Themes, which will outline the thematic stressors of middle grades

educators found in the focus group. This highlighted the top stressors and career phases

identified by the focus group of experts and additionally was recorded in the text. Once

the narrative data was condensed, it was modified into a quantitative paper-based survey

which had the additional component of participants identifying with a phase in their

teaching career. This data, once surveys were collected from participants, was recorded in

tables and figures. Tables outlined not only the top stressors identified by middle grades

educators, but also the least stressors of educators. Additionally, the percentages of

participants in various career phases were identified. Each of the survey questions was

addressed in table or figure format, identifying the pertinent stressors highlighted. The

research questions were answered both in the qualitative focus group and through the

quantitative surveys.

Item Analysis of Qualitative Focus Group Questions

Item	Research	Interview Question(s)	Research Question
1 Years of experience	Anderson, 1998; Chiu & Klassen, 2010; Harper & Tuckman, 2012	1,3	2
2 Years in current position	Anderson, 1998; Holliman, 1996	1	2
3 Lack of experience	Holliman, 1996; Mishra, 2009	8	2
4 Professional responsibilities	Carr & Kemmis, 2003	1	1
5 Previous professional experience	Carr & Kemmis, 2003; Mishra, 2009	7,8,9	2
6 Work related stress	Chiu & Klassen, 2010	4,5,6	1
7 Teacher stress	Chiu & Klassen, 2010	4,5,6	1
8 Phase of the career teacher	Steffy, 2000	2	2,3
9 Classroom climate as teacher stress	Kyriacou, 2001	7	1
10 Personal experience	Mishra, 2009	9	1,2,3

Summary

The international issue of teacher stress in the field of education is noticeably researched. Teacher stress has been established as a widespread problem and is mainly symbolized by quantitative data which includes elementary and secondary educators, leaving little focal research on stress relevant to middle grades teachers. Exploration regarding middle grades educator stress is imperative because of the potential influence the results of this study could have on the overall teacher morale, environment of schools, teacher well-being and student academic achievement.

The researcher conducted a sequential mixed methods approach to data collection pertaining to middle grades stressors in diverse teacher career phases. Steffy (2000), and her model identifying the phases of the career teacher life cycle, functioned as a guide to participants by assisting them in identifying what phase they currently relate to in their career. The population of focus involved active middle grades teachers in the State of Georgia who currently teach in grades 6-8. To begin the study, eight to ten middle grades educators were asked their expert opinions concerning stress in the workplace in a semistructured focus group. The focus group was conducted with the purpose of collecting detailed qualitative data highlighting the principal stressors experienced regularly by middle grades teachers, while also tracking the participants current career phase. Next, the interview data was transcribed and the researcher analyzed the narrative data by means of the In Vivo Coding technique and identified reoccurring themes recognized by the participants. Specifically, the researcher honed in on the stressors which impact middle grades teachers in the workplace, as outlined in the research questions.

As noted in the sequential mixed method technique, the quantitative data collection can only occur after the analyzation of the qualitative data. So, after synthesizing the data identified by the participants in the focus group, the top stressors were noted as relevant interest points for the researcher. After this data synthesis, and by means of a quantitative paper-based survey, middle grades teachers were asked to evaluate the top identified stressors and then rank them by relevance to their current and past experiences with middle grades classroom stress.

During the process of the quantitative, paper-based survey, the focus group-identified top stressors were expected to be ranked by middle grades educators with the intention of answering the research questions. The survey component entailed the researcher analyzing the conclusions of the quantitative findings regarding top stressors for middle grades educators. Additionally, the survey included another factor required to answer the research questions proposed by the researcher. When participants were requested to rank their primary work-related stressors, they were also asked to classify their current career phase. The teacher career phase data was used by the researcher with the intention of answering the research question concerning the extent to which there is a relationship between middle grades educator stress and teacher career phase.

CHAPTER IV
REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

The intention of this study was to investigate two important and underrepresented elements among educational literature: middle grades teacher stressors and phases of the career teacher. This study can be defined as a descriptive research study with a sequential exploratory mixed methods design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). The population of focus included current middle grades teachers, who actively teach in grades 6-8 in the State of Georgia. To begin this study, seven middle grades teachers and one middle grades counselor, with varying backgrounds and levels of experience, were interviewed in a focus group. The purpose of the focus group was to gather detailed qualitative data regarding the primary stressors of middle grades educators at various stages of the teaching career. The career phase model (Steffy, 2000) helped teachers identify the career phase each participant felt they currently could relate; these progressive phases included: novice, apprentice, professional, expert, distinguished and emeritus. After the focus group was implemented, the collected narrative data was coded with the purpose of identifying common themes of stress from the participants. When the primary stressors were identified, the researcher then created a survey based upon the results of the focus group and administered the survey to a larger group of middle grades educators. The administration of this survey was intended to determine if there was a consensus among educators, at varying stages in their careers, concerning relevant middle grades educator stressors.

Research Questions

1) What stressors are present in the work-place for middle grades educators?

2) How do middle school educator stressors compare based on the career phase of the teacher?

3) To what extent is there a relationship between middle grades educator stress and phases of the career teacher?

Research Design

The procedures of this research study followed a sequential exploratory design. The first step of the research process was collecting qualitative data by means of a semistructured focus group (Hays & Singh, 2012) with active middle grades educators. The qualitative data collection from the focus group informed the researcher as how to generate the quantitative, paper-based survey created for a different group of middle grades teachers. This survey included relevant middle grades educator stressors discovered from the focus group and the component of teacher career phase. Once the quantitative surveys were completed, the researcher analyzed the quantitative feedback from the middle grades teachers regarding stress and teacher career phase. Lastly, the results of the numeric quantitative data found from the survey were interpreted by the researcher with the purpose of answering the identified research questions.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The focus group, also referred to as the qualitative component of the research study, was represented by eight professionals, seven middle grades educators and one school counselor from a middle school in South Georgia. All of the participants were actively employed and working with middle school students in grades 6-8 in various areas of curricular study. Professional experience in education ranged from four months to thirty years. Two participants felt that they were in the apprentice phase, three identified with

the professional phase, two felt that they were moving from professional to expert and one educator felt she was moving from expert phase to the distinguished phase. After the focus group data was coded for themes, a survey was created which was given to a larger group of middle grades teachers. Forty-one middle school teachers at the same middle school in South Georgia were given the survey to complete. The faculty ranged in content knowledge, experience and current grade level at which they were teaching. Of the forty-one participants, one educator currently identified with the novice phase, four educators were currently in the apprentice phase, nineteen teachers chose the professional stage, eight educators identified with the expert phase, five with the distinguished phase and zero participants were in the emeritus career phase. Four participants did not identify the teacher phase with which they currently relate.

Organization of Findings and Data Analysis

Organization of Findings and Data Analyzation. The findings and data will be presented by means of the three research questions, in sequential order. The findings and data were obtained using an exploratory sequential mixed methods design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). An initial focus group was conducted with eight participants and the narrative data that was collected was used in order to inform the quantitative, researcher-designed survey which was completed by forty-one participants. The first research question, which addressed the stressors that are present in the work-place for middle grades educators, will be answered using the descriptive, narrative data gleaned from the qualitative focus group. The primary objective of this focus group was to obtain authentic information from working middle grades professionals in order to answer the first research question. The researcher determined through the coding of the narrative data that there were seven stressors which were relevant to middle grades educators.

The second research question, which focused on how middle school educator stressors compare based on the career phase of the teacher, was addressed through both the qualitative focus group and quantitative survey data. The researcher first acknowledged the pertinent focus group information which informed the survey instrument. It is also important to identify the career phase percentages that participants self-reported through the survey data. The researcher identified the top stressor and the stressor of least relevance that participants associated with early years of teaching and reviewed the data as it compared to the participants self-reported top stressor and least relevant stressor found in their current work place.

The third research question, inquiring about the extent to which there is a relationship between middle grades educator stress and phases of the career teacher, was addressed primarily through the quantitative survey data analysis, but also with supplemental focus group data. For instance, the agreement of participant beliefs concerning educator stress is addressed in quantitative format through a survey question, but was inspired by a direct focus group quote. This research question was answered through the survey questions addressing general beliefs about middle grades educator stressors, beliefs about stressors in current practice and beliefs about early career educator stressors. Data from the three ranked-response survey questions were reviewed by means of the top reported and least relevant stressors.

Findings

This study was intended to examine stressors that middle grades educators encounter in the workplace in addition to the extent to which there is a relationship between middle grades educator stress and phase of the career teacher. Three research questions assisted

in guiding the study: 1) What stressors are present in the work-place for middle grades educators? 2) How do middle school educator stressors compare based on the career phase of the teacher? 3) To what extent is there a relationship between middle grades educator stress and phases of the career teacher?

Both the initial qualitative focus group and the quantitative survey (informed by the focus group) were implemented with the intention of answering the research questions. The narrative data from the focus group was analyzed and coded using In Vivo coding (Saldana, 2016), carefully preserving the voice of the participants and also identifying key themes of current middle grades educator stressors. The paper-based survey was created with five questions for participants. The first multiple-choice survey question asked participants to identify their current career phase, the following three questions required that participants rank the seven stressors identified in the focus group from most relevant to least relevant (one being most relevant and seven being least relevant), and the final multiple-choice question asked participants to identify the statement which most aligned with their personal beliefs about educator stress. Multiple choice questions were utilized based on the notion that data could be categorized in a way that could best answer the research questions (Brace, 2004). Ranked response questions were chosen because of the way in which it allowed participants to distinguish between the various stressors identified in the focus group (Brace, 2004). The numeric data collected from the survey was then analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS.

Research question 1: What stressors are present in the work-place for middle grades educators? The initial focus group with middle grades educators assisted in addressing relevant work-place stressors. Throughout the focus group, narrative data was gleaned

from the participants as they spoke candidly about their professional experiences and stress in the middle grades classroom. The collected narrative data was coded using the In Vivo coding technique, which aided in preserving the voice of the participants by using their own words as codes for the data. Seven themes concerning middle grades educator stressors, in the words of the participants, emerged during the coding process: 1) *parents,* 2) *having to wear a lot of hats,* 3) *testing instead of giving students time to discover,* 4) *administration,* 5) *student behavior,* 6) *stress on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly* and 7) *students are not developmentally ready for many things*. These seven stressors identified by educators were evident throughout the focus group discussion and assisted in answering the first research question.

Discussion of Themes

Parents. The first theme found from the focus group data, *parents*, represented the challenges that teachers face when dealing with the parents of the students that they teach. Particularly, in reference to trying to help students academically or behaviorally with the support of parents. Teachers have signified that the over involvement or lack of interest from parents can be a key contributor to educator workplace stress (Crafford & Viljoen, 2013; Durham-Barnes, 2011). For instance, focus group participant six said, "I feel like my expectations for the students are higher than their parents' expectations." The relationship of a teacher and parent has the potential to influence students' attitudes towards both educators and overall feelings of school (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Participant seven added, "I think everything has been the teachers fault to a certain degree…they [parents] have come into the [idea] that teachers are out to get the kids, and that is so far from the truth." Participant eight recalled the anxiety of simply approaching parents with issues concerning their child, "…it's not being sure the parents are going to

back me." Participant four added, "It is sad when you have to have [colleagues] read emails before you send them [to parents] to make sure that you have not offended, because there's always backlash, in one way or another."

Having to wear a lot of hats. The second theme, *having to wear a lot of hats*, included the many "hats" that teachers have to wear that are not included in their job descriptions. Participant six stated early in the focus group, "It's having to wear a lot of different hats and see who needs what that day." For instance, participant five said, "not only do we [teachers] need to teach them their academic standards, but we have to teach them responsibility, and these kids are sometimes very resistant." Participant seven added, "some days it [my role] is teacher, some days it is 'momma', some days a motivator, sometimes all I can do is be a disciplinarian to these kids." During pre-adolescence, public school students experience a transitional period which often consists of a decline in academic performance and tested social-emotional needs (Anfara & Caskey, 2007; Cappella, Kim & Schwartz, 2014). Participant four believed that, "[middle school teachers] are the pendulum that's either going to make them [students] love school or hate school." Participant seven added, "it's the weight of what [middle schoolers] have going on, 'am I cool, am I not cool?'." Participant four said, "the pressure to help them get through middle school, it doesn't stop when the walk through the door, it carries through the whole day."

Young adolescents learn not only about themselves, but about their physical growth together with the growing interest in sustaining social skills (Musoleno & White, 2010). For example, participant two noted, "cyber-bullying on social media is a big stressor," and participant eight added, "sometimes we are counselors." Middle school students find

themselves in a provisional period where chances for risky behavior engagement become available; therefore, middle school teachers are in a unique situation where it becomes necessary for them to embrace techniques that will prevent students from partaking in such behaviors (Bernard, King, Murnan, Nabors & Vidourek, 2011). Participant eight, an expert career phase teacher, gave her insight into teaching roles and responsibilities.

> We're taking on some roles that I don't think we should; I did a lot more teaching in my early stages, and now because of all that we are expected to take care of with our students…there's less time for teaching. I don't mind being a nurturer, but I feel like some of our role as a teacher is diminished because we are having to take on so many different roles in the classroom besides teaching.

The various "hats" or roles discussed by this educator and others throughout the focus group included academic teacher, student supporter, nurturer, parental figure, disciplinarian, and also an advocate for the whole student including healthy social, physical an academic growth.

   Testing instead of giving students time to discover. The third theme, *testing instead of giving students time to discover*, refered to the time constraints associated with teaching students and the impact testing and assessment has on teaching instruction and students. Educators many times feel rigid time constraints to adequately teach the required standards (Berryhill, Fromewick & Linney, 2009; Stukes, 2015). Growing quantities of instructional time is being dedicated to assessment preparation and testing, which deprives teachers of the opportunities to be adaptable and creative in the classroom due to testing demands (Lounsbury & Vars, 2003; Musoleno & White, 2010). The focus group discussion prompted some of the stressors experienced while trying to teach required

content. Participant eight revealed, "…there's less time for teaching and lack of time to cover…to teach what we've been asked to teach." Participant six also elaborated.

> It's assessment, it's testing…I feel like I have to teach a certain thing because it's going to be tested, not because that's necessarily what I think the kids need…or what is best for them…or what they're going to use. Instead of giving students time to discover things on their own sometimes time constraints make me feel like I need to just get them what I want them to know, hurry along…having to be a certain place by the end of the year.

Successfully meeting the needs of students with various levels of knowledge and low achieving students are also significant stressors for educators (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Berryhill, Fromewick & Linney, 2009; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Participant four said, "rushing along trying to cram in all of this stuff for standards and for the test…we're losing the [lower achieving students] who need time." Participant five additionally acknowledged, "differentiation is a stressor, having to differentiate so much within one class, it's a stress." Teaching for the performance on assessments instead of the best instructional strategies for the student was a notable topic in the focus group, with the concerns of both the student and professional as areas of attention.

Administration. The fourth theme, *administration*, was addressed as a potential stressor for educators in the workplace. Particularly, educators who identified with the "professional," "expert" and "distinguished" career phases, compared working experiences in other schools and districts throughout their teaching careers. Resilient principals who are seen as instructional leaders, committed to advocating for adequate

working conditions and instructional needs, entice educators to do their best and continue

in the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Participant seven said, "stressors change

with administration, there have been times when we have been micromanaged…or [in

contrast] they allow us to teach and [administration] just comes to watch you do what you

do, and [they] know you're doing what you're supposed to be doing." Participant eight

said, "administration, the higher ups, they want to know, 'how many students are

failing?', 'what are you doing to encourage?'…'what are you doing to get better grades

out of them?'." While more seasoned educators provided insight into administrative

issues, participant five, an apprentice career phase teacher added, "But, as a new teacher

you don't really know your administration yet, so that is a stressor for a new teacher."

Administrative challenges and instructional support are huge variables in teacher

stress studies (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Beers, 2012; Darling-

Hammond, 2010; Kyriacou, 2001; Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell & Wang, 2009;

Richards, 2012; Stukes, 2015). Participant six offered that, "I would dare say

[administration] plays the biggest role [in teacher stress], because even when I have put a

lot of stress on myself…I feel like administration can eliminate of lot of stress that we put

on ourselves." When a school's climate is evaluated, the administrators must be

additionally investigated because of the significant role he or she plays in developing the

nature of a school (Black, 2011).

Student behavior. The fifth theme from the focus group, *student behavior*, noted the

challenges and stressors presented in the classroom due to behavior from students. The

behavior of students is a top source of teacher stress, which involves the lack of student

interest and effort, inattentiveness, resistance towards the teacher, rule breaking and

overall classroom disruption (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Beers, 2012; Brown, Mahan, Mahan, Park, Shelton & Weaver, 2010; DeJesus & Lens, 2006; Fisher, 2011; Kyriacou, 2001; Richards, 2012). Participant six said, "I feel like a ring master [person in charge of the circus] …I've got different acts going on and I'm trying to…juggle all the balls, keeping them in the air." Participant seven added, "[in middle school] kids who have been sweet all of the sudden become testy or they test the limits because of where they are maturity-wise." Participant six noted, "middle grades students are also very impulsive; I don't think you see quite the impulsivity at any other age range than you do in middle school." Participant one, five and seven, all within varying teacher career phases, noted that student behaviors and disrespect are top stressors in their work environments. Participant eight, an educator of thirty years added, "…behavior issues have gotten bigger, class sizes and less parent support and all of it ties into [teacher stress]." Student behavior is a notable concern for educators because a positive classroom environment is an expectation to be upheld by teachers in order to provide an acceptable learning climate that supports students (Carson, Matthews & Tsouloupas, 2014; Plog, Schaubman & Stentson, 2011).

Stress on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly. The sixth theme, *stress on myself to make sure all of the boxes are properly checked*, was inspired by the acknowledgement that intrinsic motivation in teachers to want to complete all tasks to the best of their ability is a stressor. Participant six said, "It's very frustrating as a teacher to feel like you work as hard as you do and they [the students] work as hard as they do, and [we still] don't see all the gains that we would like to see." An educator's role is many times extended beyond school hours of operation (Kaspereen, 2012; Richards, 2012;

Stukes, 2015). Participant seven acknowledged, "I could stay here all weekend, and have a spend the night party and on Monday morning my work would still not be done…it is constant, when I get the desk cleared, there's something else coming on." In addition to assigned accountabilities, educators also feel a sense of personal responsibility for important educational goals (Eren, 2014; Lauermann, 2013). Participant three elaborated on the stressors she feels are most prevalent.

> I feel like one of the stressors is all the things that we have to do just to 'check the box,' it really has zero meaning, but there are just things that have been asked for us to do, or passed down for us to do. I like doing what I am supposed to do and so I put a lot of stress on myself to make sure those boxes are checked properly, and I want it done to the best of my ability.

The focus group participants elaborated on these "boxes" that they felt needed to be checked, and they included examples such as entering data, performance rankings, changes in curriculum and standards and expectations of how to grade with commentary and work samples.

Students are not developmentally ready for many things. The seventh theme, *students are not developmentally ready for many things*, identified the challenges and stresses presented with teaching (specifically) middle school students. Pre-adolescence is a time period where students experience rapid and considerable changes developmentally (Anfara & Caskey, 2007; Cappella, Kim & Schwartz, 2014; Lounsbury & Vars, 2003; National Middle School Association, 2003). Participant eight said, "…everybody takes the same test, and, 'Is it developmentally appropriate'? For a few of our students, yes, but

I don't feel like it is for a lot of them." Participant six elaborated on the needs she had

observed from her students over the years.

> It's just the nature of the middle school child, some days their needs are more
>
> emotional than they are academic. I also feel that some of them need a year just to
>
> do some maturing because they are not developmentally ready for many things. I
>
> do not feel that the curriculum is developmentally appropriate…I'm asking
>
> students to do [things] that I do not feel like they are prepared for, or should I say,
>
> a small percentage are prepared for.

The expectations of middle grades educators are not only to effectively relate to their

students, but also to adapt instruction on a daily basis in order to meet the needs of the

emerging adolescent (Ankara & Caskey 2007, Haverback, Mee & Passe, 2012; Musoleno

& White, 2010; National Middle School Association, 2003).

Research question 2: How do middle school educator stressors compare based on the

career phase of the teacher? In order to address the stressors middle grades educators

experience compared to the career phase of the teacher, both the focus group and

quantitative survey findings were analyzed. The forty-one survey participants were first

asked to self-report the career phase which currently represented their position. In

sequential order, 2.4% of participants considered themselves to be novice, 9.8% of

participants identified with the apprentice phase, 46.3% felt they were at the professional

level, 19.5% identified as experts, 12.2% distinguished, and 9.8% of participants did not

identify their current career phase (see Figure 1).

One finding, identified from a participant in the focus group stated, "stressors are the

same for all teachers, but have become magnified over time." The researcher tied this

information into the fifth question on the survey, which asked participants to identify the statement that best described their experience with teacher stress. As a result, 39% of the 41 participants who answered the question believed that stressors are the same for all teachers but have become magnified over time. However, 36.6% of the 41 participants argued that stressors vary for teachers depending upon career phase. Additionally, 9.8% of participants agreed that stressors are the same for teachers regardless of career phase, and the other 14.6% of participants agreed that stressors vary greatly for teachers depending upon career phase (see Figure 2).

Participant's Self-Reported Teacher Career Phase
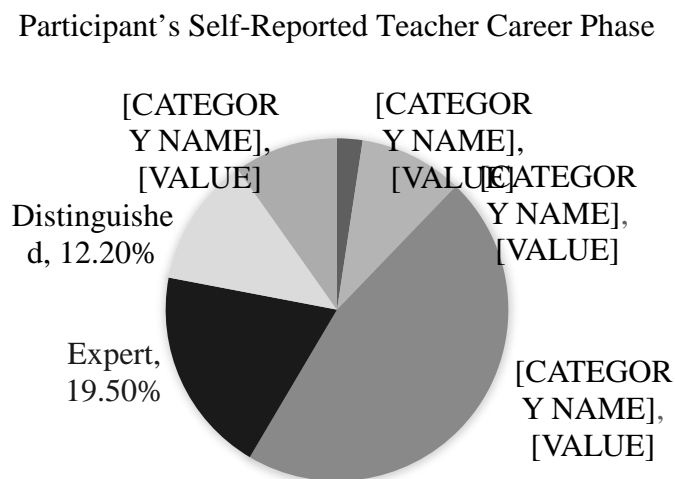
Figure 1. Pie graph displaying the self-reported career phase of the survey participants.

In an effort to better understand stressors and how they compare for teachers in varying career phases, the fourth question on the quantitative survey asked participants to rank the top seven stressors, identified from the focus group, that were present in early years of teaching. Three of the survey questions consisted of a 1-7 ranking system with the number one representing the most stressful component and the number seven representing the least stressful component of teaching in a middle grades classroom. Participants ranked *pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly*

as the top stressor in the early years of teaching, with 39% agreement and the mean=2.59, median=2.00 and mode=1 on a 1-7 ranking scale (see Table 1). Additionally, participants identified the stressor of least relevance to a new middle grades teacher to be *administration*, with 34.1% in agreement (see Table 2) and the mean=4.51, median=5.00 and mode=7 on a 1-7 ranking scale (see Table 3).

Table 1

Ranked response to survey question 4: Pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Most Stressful	16	39.0	39.0	39.0
	2nd Most Stressful	8	19.5	19.5	58.5
	3rd Most Stressful	5	12.2	12.2	70.7

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
4th Most Stressful	4	9.8	9.8	80.5
5th Most Stressful	5	12.2	12.2	92.7
6th Most Stressful	3	7.3	7.3	100.0
Total	41	100.0	100.0	

Note. Pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly was noted by survey participants as the top stressor for early career educators.

Table 2

Ranked response to survey question 4: Administration

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Most Stressful	5	12.2	12.2	12.2
	2nd Most Stressful	3	7.3	7.3	19.5
	3rd Most Stressful	8	19.5	19.5	39.0

4th Most Stressful	4	9.8	9.8	48.8
5th Most Stressful	6	14.6	14.6	63.4
6th Most Stressful	1	2.4	2.4	65.9
Least Stressful	14	34.1	34.1	100.0
Total	41	100.0	100.0	

Note. Administration was noted by survey participants as the least relevant stressor for early career educators.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics for survey question 4: Based upon your experience as a middle grades teacher, please rank the top stressors that were present in your early (novice/apprentice) career stage

	Having	Testing instead of		Pressure on myself to make sure all	Students are not develop- mentally

Table 3

Descriptive statistics for survey question 4: Based upon your experience as a middle grades teacher, please rank the top stressors that were present in your early (novice/apprentice) career stage

	Teacher Phase	Parents	to wear a lot of hats	giving students time to discover	Admin	Student Behavior	of the boxes are checked properly	ready for many things
N Valid	37	41	41	41	41	41	41	41
Missing	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	3.32	4.34	3.41	5.24	4.51	3.00	2.59	4.90
Median	3.00	4.00	3.00	6.00	5.00	2.00	2.00	5.00
Mode	3	4	1a	6	7	2	1	7
Range	4	6	6	6	6	6	5	5
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Maximum	5	7	7	7	7	7	6	7

Note. a. Multiple modes exist; the smallest value is shown.

The third survey question, in contrast, asked participants to rank their current stressors in the classroom from most stressful to least relevant stressor. Currently, 31.7% of the participants agreed that *having to wear a lot of hats* as an educator was the most stressful component of their present practice (see Table 4) with the mean=3.02, median=3.00 and

mode=1 on a 1-7 ranking scale, while *administration (*see Table 5) was the least stressful

component, with 70.7% of educators in agreement and the mean=6.44, median=7.00 and

mode=7 on a 1-7 ranking scale (see Table 6).

Table 4

Ranked response to survey question 3: Having to wear a lot of hats

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Most Stressful	13	31.7	31.7	31.7
	2nd Most Stressful	5	12.2	12.2	43.9
	3rd Most Stressful	8	19.5	19.5	63.4
	4th Most Stressful	4	9.8	9.8	73.2
	5th Most Stressful	5	12.2	12.2	85.4
	6th Most Stressful	6	14.6	14.6	100.0
	Total	41	100.0	100.0	

Note. Having to wear a lot of hats was noted by survey participants as the top stressor for educators in their current practice.

Table 5

Ranked response to survey question 3: Administration

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent

Table 5

Ranked response to survey question 3: Administration

Valid	2nd Most Stressful	1	2.4	2.4	2.4
	3rd Most Stressful	1	2.4	2.4	4.9
	4th Most Stressful	1	2.4	2.4	7.3
	5th Most Stressful	2	4.9	4.9	12.2
	6th Most Stressful	7	17.1	17.1	29.3
	Least Stressful	29	70.7	70.7	100.0
	Total	41	100.0	100.0	

Note. Administration was noted by survey participants as the least relevant stressor in their current practice.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Survey Question 3: Currently, please rank the top stressors in your middle grades educator workplace.

	Teacher Phase	Parents	Having to wear a lot of hats	Testing instead of giving students time to discover	Admin	Student Behavior	Pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly	Students are not develop-mentally ready for many things
N Valid	37	41	41	41	41	41	41	41
Missing	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	3.32	4.27	3.02	4.10	6.44	3.32	3.39	3.44
Median	3.00	4.00	3.00	5.00	7.00	3.00	3.00	4.00

Mode	3	4	1	5	7	3	2	1a
Range	4	6	5	6	5	6	6	6
Minimum	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
Maximum	5	7	6	7	7	7	7	7

Note. a. Multiple modes exist; the smallest value is shown.

Research question 3: To what extent is there a relationship between middle grades educator stress and phases of the career teacher? Determining the extent to which there is a relationship between middle grades educator stress and phases of the career teacher, was a joint effort through both the focus group and survey data collection. As previously stated, the focus group provided the authentic content for the survey, specifically the fifth question of the survey addressing the statement which best describes the participants experience with stress. The statement endorsing the idea that stressors are the same for all teachers, but have become magnified over time was agreed upon by 39% of participants, but closely following was 36.6% participant agreement with the statement supporting that stressors vary for teachers depending upon career phase (See Figure 2). The second survey question, addressing the stressors in general for middle grades educators, revealed that *having to wear a lot of hats* was the most stressful reported component, with 31.7% of participants in agreement, and *administration* as the least stressor (see Table 7 and

Table 8). Additionally, the third survey question, addressing stressors in the participant's current workplace, revealed (see Table 4) that the most stressful component of the participants present teaching job is *having to wear a lot of hats*, also with 31.7% of participants ranking this as the top stressor (see Table 4). But, when asked about the biggest stressor for a beginning teacher, 39% of participants ranked the *pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly* to be the top stressor (see Table 1). Participant belief about *having to wear a lot of hats* as the top stressor for educators in general was supported by the descriptive statistics including the mean=3.15, median=3.00 and mode=1 (see Table 9).

Survey Results:
Which statement best describes your experience with teacher stress?
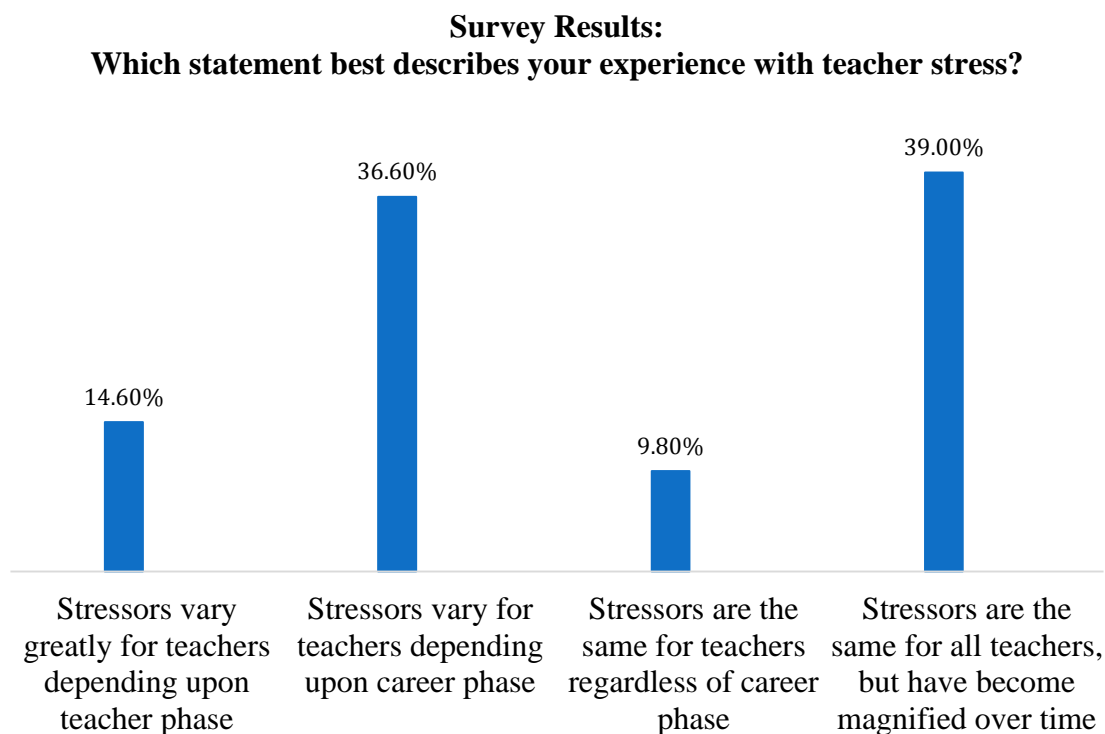
Figure 2. Results of survey question five, which addresses which statement best represents participant beliefs about stress and teacher career phase.

Table 7

Ranked response to survey question 2: Having to wear a lot of hats

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Most Stressful	13	31.7	31.7	31.7
	2nd Most Stressful	5	12.2	12.2	43.9
	3rd Most Stressful	6	14.6	14.6	58.5
	4th Most Stressful	4	9.8	9.8	68.3
	5th Most Stressful	6	14.6	14.6	82.9
	6th Most Stressful	7	17.1	17.1	100.0
	Total	41	100.0	100.0	

Note. Having to wear a lot of hats was noted by survey participants as the top stressor for middle school educators in general.

Table 8

Ranked response to survey question 2: Administration

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Most Stressful	1	2.4	2.4	2.4
	2nd Most Stressful	3	7.3	7.3	9.8
	3rd Most Stressful	4	9.8	9.8	19.5
	4th Most Stressful	1	2.4	2.4	22.0
	5th Most Stressful	1	2.4	2.4	24.4
	6th Most Stressful	3	7.3	7.3	31.7
	Least Stressful	28	68.3	68.3	100.0
	Total	41	100.0	100.0	

Note. Administration was noted by survey participants as the least relevant stressor for middle grades educators in general.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for Survey Question 2: Based upon your experience, what would you describe as the stressors specific to middle grades educators?

	Teacher Phase	Parents	Having to wear a lot of hats	Testing instead of giving students time to discover	Admin	Student Behavior	Pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly	Students are not develop-mentally ready for many things
N Valid	37	41	41	41	41	41	41	41
Missing	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	3.30	4.17	3.15	4.24	5.90	3.22	3.76	3.51
Median	3.00	4.00	3.00	5.00	7.00	3.00	4.00	4.00

Mode	3	4	1	5a	7	2	3	2
Range	4	6	5	6	6	6	6	6
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	5	7	6	7	7	7	7	7

Note. a. Multiple modes exist; the smallest value is shown.

Data Analysis

Interpretation of Results. The first research question, "what stressors are present in the workplace for middle grades educators?" was answered by means of the focus group data. Eight focus group participants, ranging in areas of expertise and teacher phase, identified the stressors which are relevant in the middle grades educator work place. The following stressors were identified through the process of coding the narrative data into themes using In Vivo coding, preserving the voice of the participants. The stressors found to be present in the workplace for middle grades educators included: 1) *parents,* 2) *having to wear a lot of hats,* 3) *testing instead of giving students time to discover,* 4) *administration,* 5) *student behavior,* 6) *pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are properly checked* and 7) *students are not developmentally ready for many things.*

The second research question, "how do middle school educator stressors compare based on career phase of the teacher?" was answered primarily though survey data. The fifth

question of the survey asked for participants to identify the statement which most represented their current beliefs about educator stress. Of the forty-one participants, 39% believed that stressors are the same for all teachers, but have become magnified over time, while 36.6% of the participants agreed that stressors vary for teachers depending upon career phase (see Figure 2). Additionally, when participants were asked to rank the stressors that impacted their early years of teaching, the top stressor was determined to be *pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly* with 39% of participants in agreement. The least relevant stressor for the participants was *administration*, with 34.1% in agreement. In contrast, when participants ranked their current stressors in the classroom, 31.7% agreed that *having to wear a lot of hats* as a teacher was the most stressful in their current career, while *administration* was again, the least stressful, with 70.7% of participants in agreement.

   Therefore, while the survey question addressing statement agreement presents contrasting views of overall feelings concerning educator stress and teacher phase, participants did acknowledge a different top stressor for early career educators than for their current practice (and for middle grades educators in general). Consequently*, administration* was believed to be the least relevant stressor for middle graded educators in general, current practicing educators and early career teachers. It should be noted, however, when reviewing the data, that throughout the focus group multiple participants spoke about administration as a great potential stressor, but all participants agreed that they were currently in a positive administrative climate conducive to educator success. Specifically, educators in the "professional", "expert" and "distinguished" career phases shared similar experiences of administrative issues during other phases of their careers. Therefore, the researcher felt that the role of administration could not be ignored in terms of teacher stressors, but the participants at this middle school felt that administration was overall positively impacting

their work environment.

The final research question, "to what extent is there a relationship between middle grades educator stress and phases of the career teacher?" can be addressed by the data collection from the survey. There are conflicting results in identifying if there is a relationship regarding educator stress and career phase. With 39% of participants agreeing that stressors are the same for educators, but have become magnified over time, and 36.6% of participants arguing that stressors vary for teachers depending upon career phase, it is difficult to determine. Looking more closely, 14.6% of participants agreed that stressors vary greatly for teachers depending upon career phase while 9.8% challenged that stressors are the same for educators regardless of career phase. It should also be noted that participants agreed that in general for all middle grades educators and currently in their professional practice, participants found the top stressor of the teaching job to be *having to wear a lot of hats* with, in both cases, 31.7% of agreement. However, when participants were asked about stressors of a beginning teacher, participants ranked the *pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly* to be the most relevant stressor, with 39% in agreement.

Results

The purpose of this study was to address the issue of teacher stress, specifically as it impacted middle grades educators in various phases of the teaching career. Three research questions guided the study, and were utilized in order to create both the focus group protocol and the survey design. Research questions included: 1) What stressors are present in the workplace for middle grades educators? 2) How do middle school educator stressors compare based on the career phase of the teacher? and 3) To what extent is there a relationship between middle grades educator stress and teacher career phase?

The focus group protocol included ten questions which were researched and created with the intention of answering the research questions. The survey instrument was informed by the focus group data, which was collected with the purpose of gathering the most relevant work stressors for practicing middle grades educators. The contents of the survey first included a question which allowed participants to identify their current teacher phase. This allowed the researcher to understand the background of the participants and also gave participants the opportunity to understand the phases of the career teacher. After this, three ranking questions were presented. These questions asked educators to rank the top stressors of middle school teachers in general, stressors of their current practice, and stressors for beginning educators. The ranking scale ranged from 1-7 with one being the most relevant stressor to seven being the least relevant work-place stressor.

Explanation and discussion of results. The first research question, which addresses the stressors present in the workplace for middle grades educators, was clearly answered by the participants of the focus group. The seven stressors, 1) *parents,* 2) *having to wear a lot of hats,* 3) *testing instead of giving students time to discover,* 4) *administration*, 5) *student behavior,* 6) *pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly* and 7) *students are not developmentally ready for many things,* mirrored the themes identified in the literature review concerning teacher stressors. This research question was answered directly through the focus group and proved that the reported middle grades educator stressors mirror the stressors that were reported in the literature review.
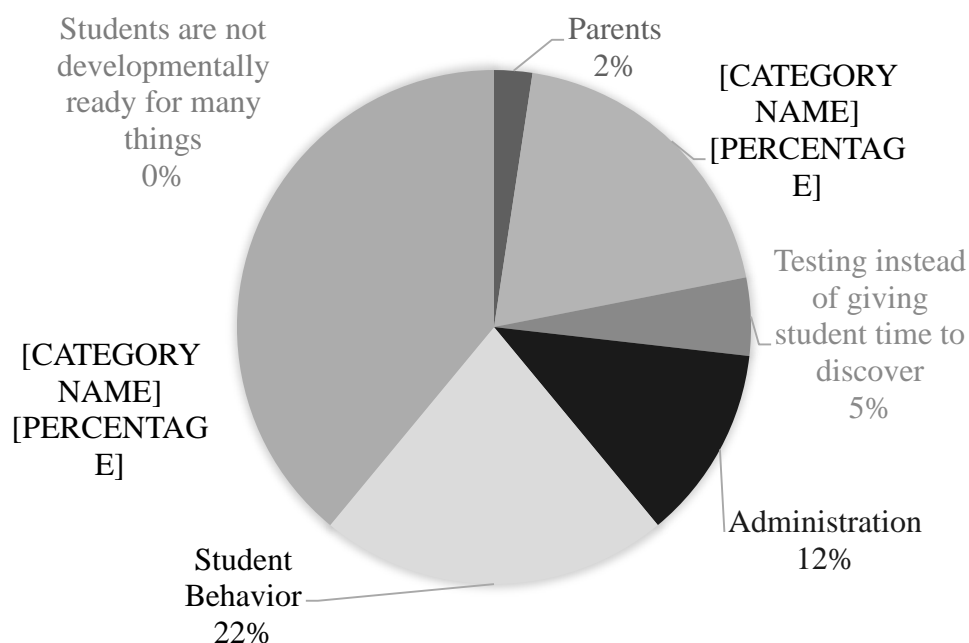
The second research question, which addressed how middle school educator stressors compare based on the career phase of the teacher, was answered both through the focus group and survey data. The focus group provided data to create the survey instrument and specifically provided a direct quote which was used to inform the fifth question of the survey. The focus group (particularly "professional", "expert" and "distinguished" career phase teachers) agreed that this was the case, and 39% of the surveyed participants believed this statement to be true and 9.8% agreed that stressors were the same for teachers regardless of teacher phase. However, on this same question, 36.6% of participants agreed that stressors vary for teachers depending upon career phase and 14.6% believed that stressors vary greatly for teachers depending upon career phase. It should also be noted that 78% of participants classified themselves as either "professional", "expert" or "distinguished" in terms of teacher phase, 12.2% identified as "novice" or "apprentice" and 9.8% did not identify. These conflicting views which addressed stressors throughout varying stages of a career educator, make it difficult to determine the extent to which educator stressors compare based upon career phase of the teacher.

Also, in an effort to determine how middle school teacher stressors compare based on teacher career phase, the top stressor and least relevant stressor were reviewed. Participants reported, that at early stages of teaching, *that pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked* was a top stressor, with 39% in agreement and a mean of 2.59 (see Figure 3). *Having to wear a lot of hats* as an educator, was only supported as most stressful to a beginning teacher, with 19.5% of participants. While, when asked to rank current stressors in the classroom, 31.7% agreed that *having to wear a lot of hats* as

a teacher was the most stressful, with a mean=3.02, and only 12.2% agreed that *pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked* was most stressful to a current educator (see Figure 4). This data implies that there is a difference in stressors based on teacher career phase. The least relevant stressor for educators (identified in all three ranked-response survey questions) regardless of career phase was *administration*, but the researcher has concluded that teachers at this school were very satisfied with the leadership role of administration. Therefore, this could have potentially played a role in biasing the results of least relevant middle grades educator stressor, due to the positive school administrative environment at this particular school.

The third research question explored the extent to which there is a relationship between middle grades educator stress and phases of the career teacher. It is difficult to determine whether there is a relationship between these two variables. In the survey question addressing statement agreement, 48.8% of participants agreed that either stressors are the same for teachers regardless of career phase, or that stressors are the same for all teachers, but have become magnified over time. Additionally, 51.2% of participants agreed that either stressors vary or vary greatly regardless of career phase. Participants did agree that both in general and in current educator practice, that the top stressor was *having to wear a lot of hats,* with 31.7% agreeing in both the second and third survey questions (see Figure 5). However, 39% of participants, when asked about their beginning teacher beliefs, agreed that *pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly* was the top stressor.

Survey Question 4: Top Stressor Present in Your Early Career Phases

Students are not developmentally ready for many things 0%

Parents 2%

[CATEGORY NAME] [PERCENTAGE]

Testing instead of giving student time to discover 5%

[CATEGORY NAME] [PERCENTAGE]

Administration 12%

Student Behavior 22%

Figure 3 **Pie chart of the top stressor in the participants' early teacher career phases (novice/apprentice).**

Survey Question 3: The Top Stressor in Your Current Middle School Workplace

Students not developmentally ready for many things 22%

Parents 5%

Having to wear a lot of hats 32%

[CATEGORY NAME] [PERCENTAGE]

[CATEGORY NAME] [PERCENTAGE]

[CATEGORY NAME] [PERCENTAGE]

Administration 0%
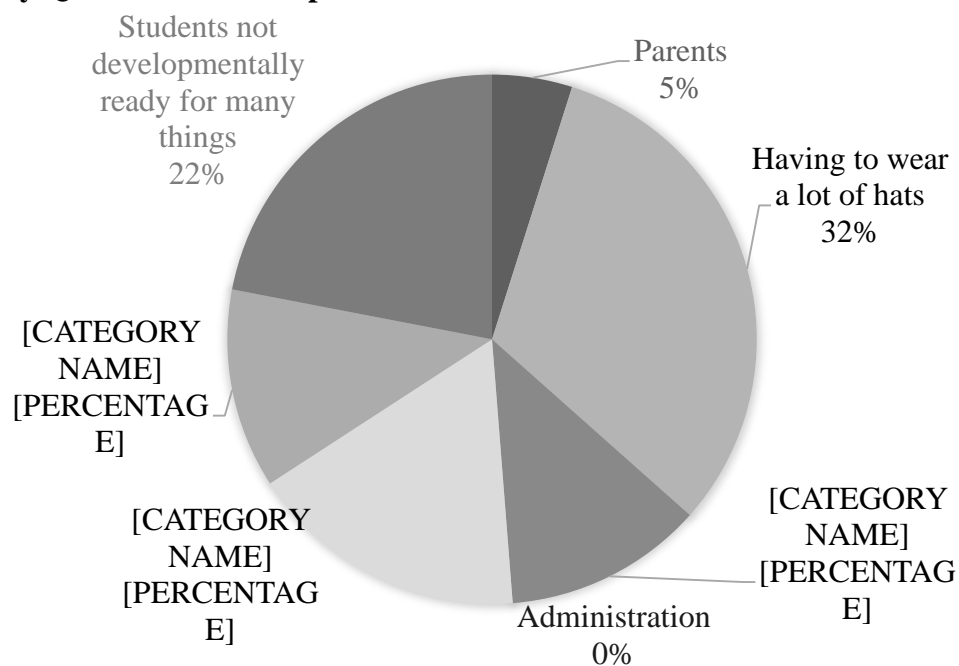
Figure 4 Pie chart of the top stressor currently found in the participants work place.

Survey Question 2: The Top Stressor Specific to Middle School Educators
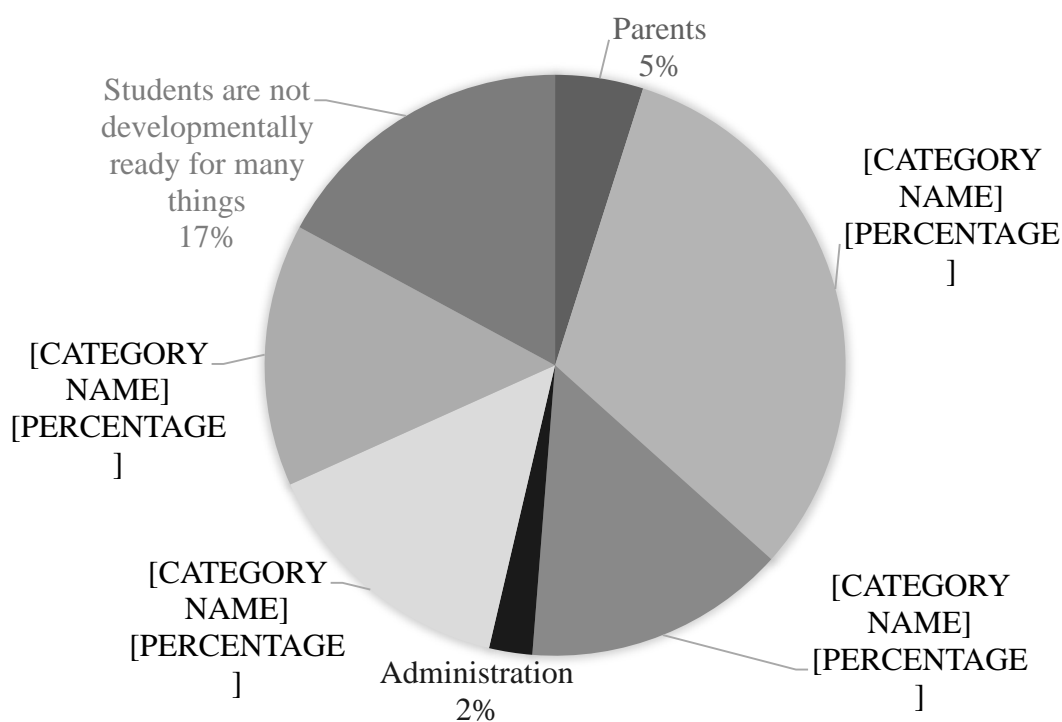
Figure 5 **Pie chart of the recorded top stressor for middle school educators in general.**

Summary of Findings

The major findings of this study can be found in the conclusions drawn from the three research questions. The first research question, which addressed what stressors are present in the workplace for middle grades educators, was directly answered by the eight participants of the focus group. There was a total of seven stressors seen as relevant by the focus group participants and they included: 1) *parents,* 2) *having to wear a lot of hats,* 3) *testing instead of giving students time to discover,* 4) *administration,* 5) *student behavior,* 6) *pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly* and 7) *students are not developmentally ready for many things.*

The second and third research questions concerning how middle grades educator stressors compare based on career phase of the teacher, and if there is a relationship

produced findings based on the survey that was created from the focus group data. Of the forty-one educators who participated in the survey, 48.8% agreed that stressors are the same for all teachers, but have been magnified over time or that stressors are the same for teachers regardless of career phase. In contrast, 51.2% agreed that stressors vary or vary greatly for teachers depending upon career phase. These findings, make it difficult to conclude if stressors vary for teachers in different career phases, or if there is a notable relationship. It is challenging to determine the extent to which there is a relationship between middle grades educator stress and phase of the career teacher. Conflicting findings regarding the three ranked response survey questions and the fourth statement agreement survey question, leave the researcher still wondering if the extent to which there is a relationship between middle grades educator stressors and phase of the career educator.

When asked about the early years of teaching, 39% agreed that *pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly* was the top stressor, and *administration* was the least relevant 34.1%. Additionally, 22% of early career teachers identified *student behavior* as the top stressor and 20% of participants believed *having to wear a lot of hats* was a top stressor of beginning career teachers.

Contrastingly, when participants were asked about their current stressors, 31.7% believed that *having to wear a lot of hats* as an educator was most stressful, and *administration* was least stressful, with 70.7% in agreement. 22% of participants believed *students are not developmentally ready for many things* was the top stressor and 17% agreed that *student behavior* was the top stressor in their current practice. The top stressor for early career educators and for current middle grades educators (and middle grades

educators in general) noticeably vary. It should also be noted that the participants of the focus group and the survey were all from the same middle school, and, through the focus group participants revealed that the current administration provided a positive work environment for teachers.

CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Middle grades educator stress and teacher career phase were the primary areas of investigation for this research project. This study was guided by three research questions: 1) What stressors are present in the workplace for middle grades educators? 2) How do middle school educator stressors compare based on the career phase of the teacher? and 3) To what extent is there a relationship between middle grades educator stress and phases of the career teacher?

To begin the investigation, a semi-structured focus group was conducted with seven middle grades educators and one middle school counselor from varying areas of expertise and teacher phases. The objective of this focus group was to give insight into all of the research questions, but to primarily give authentic feedback for the first research question, "what stressors are present in the workplace for middle grades educators?" These participants were asked ten questions about their experiences with stress in the middle school classroom, and the extent to which stressors have varied or stayed the same throughout the phases of the career teacher. The narrative data from the focus group was coded by the researcher with the intent of identifying themes of middle school educator stressors. Seven themes were identified: 1) *parents*, 2) *having to wear a lot of hats*, 3) *testing instead of giving students time to discover*, 4) *administration*, 5) *student behavior*, 6) *stress on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly* and 7) *students are not developmentally ready for many things*.

The themes gleaned from the focus group were then used to develop a survey for another group of forty-one educator participants at the same middle school. This survey

was intended to answer the remaining two research questions. This survey consisted of one question asking teachers to identify their phase in the teaching career, three questions which asked participants to rank the seven stressors in terms of their relevance for: 1) middle school educators in general, 2) their current practice and 3) beginning career educators. The last question asked participants to mark the statement which best coincided with their personal beliefs about educator stress. After this, the researcher used SPSS to generate descriptive statistics for the numeric data attained from the completed surveys.

Contributions of the Focus Group Themes

Parents. *Parents*, as a stressor for middle school teachers, was a noticeable theme identified throughout the focus group. "Parents of students" was also identified in the literature review as a stressor relevant to the teaching profession. In the field of education, a crucial way in which parents gain access to the inner components of a school is by means of the educator (Vincent, 2013). However, participant seven in the focus group noted, "they [parents] have come into thinking that all teaches are out to get kids, and that is so far from the truth." Previous literature also supports that a lack of parental support can result in noticeable concerns for students (Durham-Barnes, 2011; Kaspereen, 2012). Participant six in the focus group supported this by saying, "my expectations for the students are higher than their parents' expectations." It seems that *parents*, as a middle grades educator stressor, can be supported by the lack of parental support and overall distrust in discernment educators feel from parents. However, throughout the survey, *parents* was consistently ranked as a least relevant stressor. Two percent agreed that *parents* were a top stressor as an early career educator, and 5% agreed that parents were a top stressor to current educators or middle grades educators in general. While

teachers seemed disillusioned with the difficulties associated with parents of students, clearly it does not compare to the other stressors relevant to workplace stress.

Having to wear a lot of hats. *Having to wear a lot of hats*, was a theme identified throughout the focus group as an area of concern for stress in middle grades teachers. This theme was supported in the literature review as a relevant teacher stressor in the form of "personal responsibility", "workload" and "diverse learning needs." An educator's role is many times extended past the hours of school operation (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Kaspereen, 2012; Richards, 2012; Stukes, 2015). And, in addition to assigned responsibilities, teachers also feel personally responsible for other goals (Eren, 2014; Lauermann, 2013). Participant six in the focus group noted, "It's having to wear a lot of different hats and see who needs what that day." Participant five added, "not only do we [teachers] need to teach them their academic standards, but we have to teach them responsibility, and these kids are sometimes very resistant." It was evident throughout the focus group that the role of an educator, and *having to wear a lot of hats*, taking on numerous roles without warning was a constant challenge. The various "hats" or roles that educators felt they were responsible for encompassed most of the focus group discussion. Terms such as "disciplinarian", "momma", "counselor", "educator" and "supporter" were some of the few examples given by participants. Additionally, not surprisingly, survey participants, with 31.7% in agreement, believed *having to wear a lot of hats* was the top stressor in their current practice with a mode=1, median=3.00 and mean=3.02. The roles that the educators felt they had to play each day in the middle grades classroom proved to be an overwhelming stressor, especially since educators viewed many of them as unwarranted.

Testing instead of giving students time to discover. *Testing instead of giving students time to discover* was a noteworthy theme throughout the focus group discussion. This theme is supported by the "workload and accountability policies" portion of the literature review. Pressure on standardized test accountability and performance has made educators workloads a common professional stressor (Beers, 2012; Bonus, Davidson, Flook, Goldberg & Pinger, 2013; Kyriacou, 2001; Richards, 2012; Stukes, 2015). Instructional time is being devoted more and more to testing and preparation, which leaves educators feeling dissatisfied with the lack of opportunities to be flexible and creative (Lounsbury & Vars; Musoleno & White, 2010). Participant six in the focus group noted,

> Instead of giving students time to discover things on their own sometimes time
>
> constraints make me feel like I need to just get them what I want them to know,
>
> hurry along…having to be a certain place by the end of the year.

Testing instead of giving students time to discover proved to be something that varied with the career phase of the educator according to the survey data. While 5% of survey participants believed this to be the top stressor for early career phase educators, 12% agreed it was the top stressor in their current practice and 14% believed it was the top stressors for middle grades educators in general. Perhaps this could be due to the lack of experience in early educators in terms of understanding the value of allowing students to discover information instead of focusing on assessment information.

Administration. *Administration*, as a stressor for middle grades teachers, was of notable concern throughout the focus group discussion. This theme was supported in the "administrative issues" section of the literature review. Administrative challenges are a large variable in stress studies involving educators (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer &

Torf, 2011; Beers, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kyriacou, 2001; Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell & Wang, 2009; Richards, 2012; Stukes, 2015). Participant seven in the focus group said,

> stressors change with administration, there have been times when we have been micromanaged…or [in contrast] they allow us to teach and [administration] just comes to watch you do what you do, and [they] know you're doing what you're supposed to be doing.

Throughout the three ranked response survey questions, *administration* was viewed as the least stressful for middle grades teachers in general, current educators and beginning teachers. The participants ranked *administration* as the least relevant stressor for their current practice, with 70.7% of participants in agreement, a mean=6.44, median=7 and mode=7. The focus group discussion spent considerable time discussing the potential (and previous experiences) of administrative stress, primarily from professional, expert and distinguished phase educators. This made *administration* a theme impossible to ignore. However, though both literature and the focus group supported *administration* as a potential stressor; educators at this particular school believed themselves to be in a positive administrative climate. So, while this is a notable teacher stress concern, this particular body of participants reported being in an administrative climate conducive to less educator stress, regardless of career phase.

Student behavior. Another theme found after the focus group took place was that of *student behavior* as a stressor for middle grades educators. "Managing student behaviors" was a well-noted stressor found in the literature review. The misbehavior of students can impact teachers greatly and can influence the general student learning through classroom

environment disruption (Carson, Matthews & Tsouloupas, 2014; Plog, Schaubman & Stentson, 2011). Participant seven in the focus group said, "[in middle school] kids who have been sweet all of the sudden become testy or they test the limits because of where they are maturity-wise." *Student behavior* seemed to be a stressor that was impacted by the career phase of the educator based upon survey results. Twenty-two percent agreed that *student behavior* was the top stressor for early career educators, 17% believed it to be the top stressor in the current workplace, and 15% agreed that it was the top stressors for middle school teachers in general. The researcher would like to suggest that experience and growth into different career phases makes it slightly less stressful to manage student behavior.

Stress on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly. A relevant stressor impacting middle grades educators was identified as *stress on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly*. While this specific stressor was not directly identified in the literature review, the idea of intrinsic motivation, as motivation necessary for environmental success was identified (Deci & Ryan, 2004). Participant three in the focus group said, "I like doing what I am supposed to do and so I put a lot of stress on myself to make sure those boxes are checked properly, and I want it done to the best of my ability." Alongside the assigned accountabilities, teachers feel a sense of personal responsibility for other important educational goals (Eren, 2014; Lauermann, 2013). Interestingly, 39% of the survey participants identified *stress on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly* as the top stressor for teachers in the early phases (novice and apprentice) of teaching, with the mode=1, median=2.00 and mean=2.59.
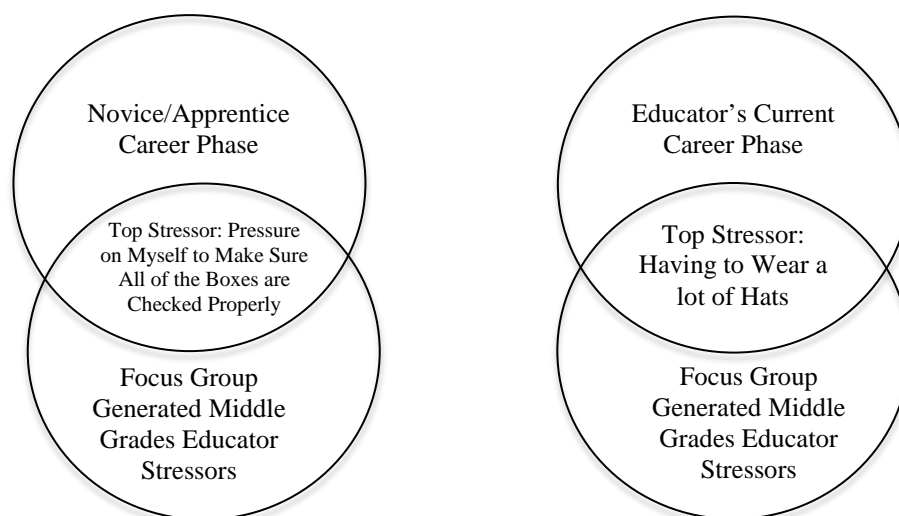
Students are not developmentally ready for many things. The seventh identified theme from the focus group, *students are not developmentally ready for many things*, was geared more toward the adolescent, middle grades learner. However, the literature review did address some challenges with "diverse learning needs". For example, the challenge in adjusting lessons to meet the individual learning needs in a classroom is uneasy and professionally challenging (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Chen, Paquette & Rieg, 2007). According to the survey results, participants did indicate that *students are not developmentally ready for many things* is a stressor that varies based upon ones career phase. For example, no participants indicated that this was the top stressor for a teacher in his or her early career phase. But, 22% of participants agreed this was the top stressor in their current workplace and 17% agreed that this was the top stressor for middle school educators in general. It seems that the longer an educator is in the profession, the more in tune they become to the developmental needs of the middle school student.

Contributions of the Theoretical Frameworks

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) was the framework for this study used to identify stressful experiences as the transaction between an individual and his or her environment. The stressors identified by participants in the focus group were all based upon the individuals (teachers) and how they interact with their classroom and school environments. *Parents*, *having to wear a lot of hats*, *testing instead of giving students time to discover*, *administration*, *student behavior*, *stress on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked* and *students are not developmentally ready for many things* are all stressors identified due to the interactions of the school environment and the educator. The Transactional Model of Stress and

Coping assisted in underling the importance of addressing stress, in this case middle

school teacher stress, due to the health and emotional well-being risks to an individual

determined by his or her capacity to function in stressful situations (Lazarus & Folkman,

1984).

The Teacher Career Phase "Life Cycle" Model is the advocacy model which provided

six phases in which teachers progress in order to sustain excellence as career educators

(Steffy, 2000). This progression of teaching phases: novice, apprentice, professional,

expert, distinguished and emeritus allowed participants to identify and understand their

own career phase in relation to the variable of stress. This model also allowed the

researcher to identify throughout the study the potential extent to which there was a

relationship between middle grades educators and teacher career phase. The following

visual describes some of the results of the study in terms of the frameworks:

Novice/Apprentice
Career Phase

Top Stressor: Pressure
on Myself to Make Sure
All of the Boxes are
Checked Properly

Focus Group
Generated Middle
Grades Educator
Stressors

Educator's Current
Career Phase

Top Stressor:
Having to Wear a
lot of Hats

Focus Group
Generated Middle
Grades Educator
Stressors

Analysis of Research Findings

The major findings from this study are reported by means of answering the three

research questions. The first research question, "what stressors are present in the

workplace for middle grades educators?", was answered through the focus group, in the seven themes identified by participants. Stressors present in the workplace for middle grades educators include: 1) *parents*, 2) *having to wear a lot of hats*, 3) *testing instead of giving students time to discover*, 4) *administration*, 5) *student behavior*, 6) *stress on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly* and 7) *students are not developmentally ready for many things*.

Research findings for the second research question, "how do middle school educator stressors compare based on the career phase of the teacher?" and third research question, "to what extent is there a relationship between middle grades educator stressors and phases of the career teacher?" were answered primarily by means of the survey data. When participants were asked to identify the statement which best aligned with their beliefs about teacher stress, 48.8% agreed that stressors are the same for teachers regardless of career phase or that stressors are the same for all educators, but have become magnified over time. In contrast, 51.2% of participants believed that stressors vary or vary greatly for teachers depending upon career phase. Additionally, the top stressor identified in the early years of teaching was agreed to be *pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly*, with 39% in agreement, mean=2.59, median=2.00 and mode=1 on a ranking scale of 1-7. The stressors of least relevance to a beginning career phase middle grades teacher was found to be *administration* with 34.1% in agreement, mean=4.51, median=5.00 and mode=7 on a ranking scale of 1-7.

When participants were asked to rank stressors in their current work place environments, 31.7% of participants agreed that *having to wear lot of hats* as a teacher was the most relevant stressor with a mean of 3.02, median=3.00 and mode=1 on a

ranking scale of 1-7. Additionally, participants agreed that 31.7% of middle grades teachers in general believed that *having to wear a lot of hats* as an educator was most stressful. *Administration* was found to be the least stressful component of the current workplace with 70.7% of participants in agreement, a mean of 6.44, mean=7.00 and mode=7 on a ranking scale of 1-7. Participants also agreed that middle school educators in general find *administration* to be the least stressful component of the job, with 68.3% participant support.

Research Findings in Relationship to Research

In terms of identifying the stressors that are present in the workplace for middle grades educators, the seven stressor themes identified from the focus group coincide with the available literature concerning teacher stress. The focus group data adds to the bodies of literature on teacher stress because it comes solely from current middle school teachers, instead of primarily elementary and secondary school teachers, which fills the gap in literature that was initially discovered. Previous educator stress studies support the following as relevant stressors for teachers: 1) personal responsibility (Eren, 2014; Kaspereen, 2012; Lauermann, 2013; Richards, 2012; Stukes, 2015), 2) managing student behavior (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Beers, 2012; Brown, Mahan, Mahan, Park, Shelton & Weaver, 2010; DeJesus & Lens, 2006; Fisher, 2011; Kyriacou, 2001; Richards, 2012), 3) diverse learning needs (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Berryhill, Fromewick & Linney, 2009; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015), 4) school setting (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Fitchett. Lambert, Lineback, McCarthy & Reiser, 2015), 5) workload and accountability policies (Anfara & Knox, 2013; Beers, 2012; Bonus, Davidson, Flook, Goldberg & Pinger, 2013; Kyriacou, 2001; Plog, Schaubman & Stentson, 2011; Richards, 2012; Stukes, 2015), 6) administrative

issues (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Beers, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kyriacou, 2001; Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell & Wang, 2009; Richards, 2012; Stukes, 2015), 7) parents of students (Crafford & Vijoen, 2013; Durham-Barnes, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010), and 8) personal and professional life balance (Atkins, Mehta, Shernoff, Spencer & Torf, 2011; Blase, Blase & Du, 2007; Doney, 2013; Troman, 2000).

Additionally, it should be noted that seven themes were identified from the middle grades educator focus group: 1) *parents*, 2) *having to wear a lot of hats*, 3) *testing instead of giving students time to discover*, 4) *administration*, 5) *student behavior*, 6) *stress on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly* and 7) *students are not developmentally ready for many things*. These themes identified from the focus group, mirror very closely the literature that supports workplace stress for teachers, and add to the literature by representing a different group of educators.

The survey results concerning teacher stress beliefs provided conflicting findings. Of the participants, 48.8% agreed that stressors are the same for all educators regardless of teacher career phase. While, in contrast, 51.2% of participants believed that stressors vary or vary greatly for teachers depending upon career phase. In previous literature about teacher stress, it was stated that it is often assumed that new teachers are more stressed, but in unconnected studies, Chan, Chen & Chong (2010) and Fisher (2011) identified no substantial difference between stress levels in new career educators as opposed to more experienced teachers. Additionally, Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2015) concluded that causes of perceived stress and job satisfaction is constant for all teaching professionals, regardless of age or teaching experience. Previous literature also attained that every educator

requires support, while newer teachers could benefit from mentoring and assistance with lesson plans, veteran teachers may require burnout prevention support techniques and school leadership position preparation (Lambert, McCarthy & Reiser, 2014; Stukes, 2015). In studies combining teacher stress and teacher experience, Fisher (2011) found through quantitative survey, that there was no significant difference between the stress scores of new high school teachers and veteran high school educators; Stukes (2015) found through qualitative interviews and focus groups that teachers of both novice and veteran elementary educator groups had common stressors. The mixed methods research study conducted with middle grades educators mirrors the conflicting findings in previous literature while also filling the gaps in literature by using a mixed methods research design and using a participant base of exclusively middle grades educators.

   A key finding in addressing the second and third research questions included survey results pertaining to the top stressor identified in the early years of teaching. P*ressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly*, as the top stressor, with 39% in agreement, mean=2.59, median=2.00 and mode=1 on a ranking scale of 1-7. Additionally, the teacher stressor of least relevance for the beginning career phase middle grades was identified as *administration* with 34.1% in agreement, mean=4.51, median=5.00 and mode=7 on a ranking scale of 1-7. Interestingly, Beers (2012) discovered that early career educators found environmental factors to be more stressful than more experienced groups of educators and noted that as teachers' experience was gained, more emphasis was placed on the demands presented by the students than early career educators. Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2015) reported that all teachers who reported high job satisfaction were driven by intrinsic motivation. With *pressure on myself to make*

sure all of the boxes are checked properly as a top stressor for early career educators, a connection can be seen between previous literature through the significance of intrinsic motivation and wanting to perform tasks adequately as a teaching professional. Likewise, the change mentioned by Beers (2012) of moving from being stressed by ones teaching environment to being stressed more by the needs of the student was supported by the findings of the survey data. This can be seen by *pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked* as the top stressor for beginning teachers as opposed to *having to wear a lot of hats* for students as supported as the top stressor by current educators.

The final significant finding in answering the research questions, includes the top stressor that educators reported in their current work place environments, 31.7% believed *having to wear lot of hats* as an educator was the most relevant stressor with a mean of 3.02, median=3.00 and mode=1 on a ranking scale of 1-7. Additionally, participants also agreed that 31.7% of middle grades educators in general believed *having to wear a lot of hats* was the top stressor. *Administration* was agreed to be the least stressful component of the current workplace with 70.7% of participant agreement, a mean of 6.44, mean=7.00 and mode=7 on a ranking scale of 1-7. Participants also concluded that generally, middle school educators find *administration* to be the least stressful job component with 68.3% participant support. Beers (2012), in his educator experience and stress research, discovered that teachers at later places in their careers mentioned students and the demands presented by students as stressors instead of parents or other issues. This coincides with the focus group data supporting that educators have to wear a lot of hats in order to meet the needs of students in their classroom. The focus group and survey completed exclusively by middle grades educator participants added to the existing

literature, primarily confirming what has been discovered about teacher stress and experience in the classroom. The findings also fill the gap in literature by honing in on an underrepresented group of educators in the field of teacher stress.

Conclusions

Research question 1: What stressors are present in the workplace for middle grades educators? The initial focus group, consisted of eight middle grades professionals, ranging from two educators in the apprentice phase, three professional phase educators, two moving from the professional to the expert teaching phase, and one expert teacher. This focus group was well-rounded in terms of teaching experience, grade level and perspective, and participants revealed seven themes related to middle grade educator stressors in the workplace: 1) *parents*, 2) *having to wear a lot of hats*, 3) *testing instead of giving student time to discover*, 4) *administration*, 5) *student behavior*, 6) *stress on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly* and 7) *students are not developmentally ready for many things*. These themes directly coincide with the literature that has evaluated educator stress, but adds a fresh and current perspective seen from the viewpoint of only middle grades teachers. The focus group was comprised of teachers from varying backgrounds, with a vast difference in professional experience. Many of the stressors mentioned were supported by teachers of all career phases, with the exception of *administration*. While the educators at this particular school, based on both focus group data and survey data, considered themselves not stressed by current administration, an apprentice career phase teacher noted that when you are new to the profession and do not have the relationship with administration, it can be a stressor. The conclusion can be drawn that the stressors present in the workplace for middle grades educators are also

present in the workplace for educators at the elementary and secondary levels as noted in

the literature review.

   Research question 2: How do middle school educator stressors compare based on the

career phase of the teacher? The survey portion of the study was created based upon the

focus group themes, and forty-one middle grades educators completed the survey with

self-reported teacher career phase as follows: 2.4% novice, 9.8% apprentice, 46.3%

professional, 19.5% experts, 12.2% distinguished and 9.8% did not identify. There is not

a certain reason as to why some participants did not identify their career phase on the first

question of the survey. However, a varied perspective from participants can be seen by

the career phases of participants. Steffy (2000) noted that most educators who comprise

the profession identify with the professional phase of the career teacher. The fifth

question of the survey was created from a perspective noted in the focus group, "stressors

are the same for all teachers, but have become magnified over time." Ultimately, 48.8%

of participants agreed that this statement was true or that stressors are the same for all

teachers. But, 51.2% believed that stressors vary or vary greatly for teachers depending

upon career phase. This does not provide enough evidence of a relationship between

middle school educator stressors and phase of the career teacher. Though there seemed to

be agreement in the focus group regarding stressors being the same for all educators, just

magnified over time, when asked to agree with a statement about educator stress, less

than half agreed it to be true.

   When participants were asked to rank the stressors, which plagued early career

educators, 39% agreed that *pressure put on myself to make sure all of the boxes are*

checked properly was the top stressor. This stressor had a mode=1, with a median value

of 2.00 and mean of 2.59. Beers (2012) noted that new career educators are overwhelmed more with all the environmental tasks that demand attention as a teacher. The conclusion can be drawn that this data complements previous literature in terms of beginning teacher stressors. The stressor of *administration* was ranked as least relevant to a new middle school teacher with 34.1% in agreement, a mean of 4.51, median=5.00 and mode=7. It should be noted that educators all came from the same middle school, and that the focus group revealed a positive administration climate with great likeability from educators. So, while *administration* as a stressor could not be ignored from the focus group data, the results of this portion may be skewed due to the positive school administrative climate.

Additionally, when participants were asked the least stressful component of their current practice as middle grades educators, 70.7% agreed it was *administration*, with a mean of 6.44, median=7.00 and mode=7. This overwhelming percentage of agreement supports the conclusion that middle school teachers at this specific school believed themselves to be in a positive administrative climate. When asked about the current top stressor of their practice, middle grades educators agreed with 31.7% that *having to wear a lot of hats* as a teacher was the most stressful. The participants in the focus group gave many examples of the roles that they play on a daily basis, which are not included in their job description. It can be concluded that teachers at this middle school, the longer they are in the profession, are more aware of the needs of the whole student and therefore believe *wearing a lot of hats*, is the biggest stressor in their current practice.

Research question 3: To what extent is there a relationship between middle grades educator stressors and phases of the career teacher? When participants were asked to complete questions 2-4 on the survey, the were asked to rank the seven stressors from the

focus group for middle school educators in general, their current practice and also early career educators. Overall, participants had the same opinions about general middle school educator stress and stress of their current practice. Both identifying *having to wear a lot of hats* as the top stressor (31.7% agreement) and *administration* as the least stressful component (68.3% and 70.7% agreement) of the work environment. When asked about stressors of the beginning career teacher, in the novice or apprentice stage, however, *pressure on myself to make sure all of the boxes are checked properly* was the top stressor with a*dministration*, again, as the least stressful. It could be concluded from these opinions that there may be a relationship between educator stressors and phases of the career teacher. But, when reviewing the fifth survey question, which asked educators to agree with a statement about teacher stress, 48.8% that stressors are the same for all educators (though may become magnified) regardless of career phase, and 51.2% agree that stressors vary or vary greatly for teachers. This information, therefore, makes it difficult to determine the extent to which there is a relationship between middle grades educator stress and teacher career phase. Specifically, large percentages supported *administration* as the least relevant stressor for every question at this middle school. Conflicting findings in terms of the top stressors and least relevant stressors for both beginning teachers and current stressors in the classroom make it hard to draw a significant conclusion. The conflicting findings, based upon the three ranked survey questions and one statement agreement question, make it difficult to interpret whether there is a significant relationship between these two factors.

Implications

The importance of this research study and its results are immeasurably valuable to educational systems and their teaching professionals. School and district leaders now

have access to data provided solely by middle school educators that can improve both morale and school environments as it relates to professional stressors. If teacher stress can be considered a priority in middle schools, the quality of classroom learning environments could be improved and enriched for educators, and more importantly the students. This study provides insights and fills a gap in terms of solely middle grades educator stress research, and the results will provide greater understanding of specifically middle grades educator stressors. The results of this mixed methods study will contribute to a rapidly increasing body of research concerning educator stress.

The results of this study provided insight into the demands and specific stressors of educators at different phases of their career. Implications for this research include aiding schools (specifically middle schools) and school districts with relevant professional learning opportunities and proactive stress prevention strategies in regards to teacher stressors. Administration and leadership should strive to provide teachers with chances to participate in practical strategies to prevent and alleviate stressors in the current workplace. Specifically, if applicable to the school setting, the seven middle grades educator stressors identified in this study. Though it is difficult to determine if there is a long-term and distinct relationship between middle grades educator stress and phases of the career teacher, leadership in schools now have a platform to improve teacher well-being through the awareness of relevant workplace stressors. The possibilities for initiatives intended to reduce negative consequences caused by stressors in the workplace or to promote energy in educators with focus on how to manage relevant stressors is an option. The results of the study provide information about 1) relevant workplace stressors for middle grades educators and 2) comparisons of top stressors for current educators and

beginning career educator stressors. The value of this information is immeasurable for administrators and leaders. The results provide insight into how their employees are feeling about their workplace and the pertinent issues that can lead to teacher retention and job satisfaction.

The researcher finds this study to be significant because of the voice it provided to solely middle school teachers. This relevant insight provides stepping stones for administration to improve middle grades teacher morale and well-being, school environments in general and student learning. The stressors experienced in the workplace by middle grades educators deserves to be studied in order to better understand the retention and attrition of educators, so that successful classroom environments can be maintained. The voice of educators is vital, specifically to administration, in order to maintain excellence and strategies that work in the classroom. Enhancing and understanding the professional well-being of educators in terms of the stressors experienced in the middle grades classroom is desperately in need of attention due to the detrimental effects it can ultimately have on both the educator and his or her students.

This study involved participants from one middle school in South Georgia with educators who seemed very satisfied with their school administrative climate based upon the qualitative focus group and the quantitative survey findings. Though this may be something that effects the relevant implications for larger populations of middle school teachers in more diverse settings with possible administrative challenges, it can provide stressors relevant to middle grades educators specifically. Though it is difficult to determine if there is a significant relationship between middle grades educator stressors and phases of the career teacher from this study's results, the qualitative focus group data

provided relevant insight (possibly short-term) into the current stressors of middle grades educators in Georgia.

There are significant implications for middle grades teachers. Teachers in grades 6-8 in Georgia now have access to a study that provides data supporting relevant workplace stressors for specifically middle grades educators. School leadership and administration have a responsibility to their teachers with these middle grades educator stress insight to maintain and possibly improve their current middle school environments. Middle grades leaders and administrators, it is important to take note of the seven specific stressors identified in this study. Also, take a careful look at the perceived top stressors for educators and for beginning career educators. Poll your specific schools and determine if this information regarding middle school educator stress is supported by your staff. Then, do something about it. Take the top stressor identified and allow teacher input and insight into the best ways to address identified stressors, then do what is most practical and beneficial to educators in order to alleviate stress so that they can better serve their students. Then, provide your insight, and the results of this study with your school district. School district officials, use the results of this study, the input from middle grades teachers and administrators in your district, and provide professional learning or other service to help alleviate or aid in the persistence of top stressors. Also, be mindful of beginning career educators and be aware of the top stressors provided by participants of this study. The benefit of providing opportunities to address top stressors and to do something about the problem can be seen in teacher morale, school environments and most importantly classroom learning environments.

Recommendations

The researcher would like to provide some recommendations for implementing the results of the study: 1) be aware of the specific characteristics of the participant population before implementation and 2) keep in mind influencing school factors that may have contributed to the results of the study. The participants of this study were all educators from the same middle school in rural South Georgia. The results of this study, and the top stressors that were identified, may be difficult to implement or may not be relevant to a teacher population located in a more urban environment. Additionally, the school's administrative climate definitely played a role in influencing the least stressful factors for middle school teachers at this school. If a school had an administrative climate that is contrary to the study's, the implementation of the results of this study may prove to be irrelevant. In order for the results of this study to be implemented properly, the middle school and its system would have to mirror the rural climate and positive administrative atmosphere that was found in this study.

In terms of recommendations for further research: 1) utilize participants from multiple schools and districts, 2) ask participants open-ended questions for suggestions to alleviate top stressors identified and 3) consider utilizing multiple focus groups which are divided into specific career phases. This research could be improved by including participant opinions from multiple middle schools and districts. The positive administrative climate at the one school had an impact on the least relevant stressors for this particular group of educators. Multiple middle schools would provide input from varying environments and would add a more diverse and inclusive set of perspectives. Additionally, the researcher originally believed that there could be a difference in the second and third ranking questions on the survey. One question asked about the stressors of middle school

educators in general and the other asked about current practice stressors from middle

grades educators. Results provided almost identical data for both questions, leading the

researcher to believe that further research should instead include an open-ended question

with suggestions on how to improve top stressors. This would provide not only an answer

to the question of middle grades educator stressors, but also a solution as to how to

improve the stressful situations. Lastly, consider conducting multiple focus groups

divided into the specific career phases. For example, a focus group with only novice and

apprentice teachers, then a focus group with professional and expert teachers and lastly a

focus group with distinguished and emeritus educators. This strategy would allow all

educators to speak freely with educators of similar professional experience without the

influence of more veteran teachers.

Dissemination

A specific group that could benefit from the findings and results of this research is the

middle school administrators from the participating school district. This population

would be interested in the results of the study because of the direct insight from

practitioners in their own school district. Their educators were given a voice to

communicate the stressors which impact their daily work. This lends itself to practical

and relevant information for enhancing the environments of middle grades educators.

These findings can be communicated through a presentation with the results in graphs

and charts identifying pertinent information from the study that could benefit their

teachers. The seven thematic stressors and top stressors for early career versus current

career educators would be relevant starting points.

Another beneficiary could be the professional learning planners in the participating

district. Whether by email, through graphic representation or in person, persons in charge

of professional learning could use the results of this study to provide meaningful and relevant learning opportunities for middle grades educators in the district. This population could make a difference in school climate, teacher morale and student learning by implementing strategies to improve upon areas of top teacher stress in middle grades educators in their district.

Concluding Thoughts

Through the review of the multifaceted literature regarding teacher stress, an underrepresented body of educators was noted. Elementary and secondary educator studies (Chan, Chen & Chong, 2010; Fisher, 2011; Lambert, McCarthy, McDonnell & Wang, 2009; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Stukes, 2015) were well represented with large samples while middle grades educators (Abernavoli, Greenberg, Harris & Katz, 2013; McIntyre, 2011) were less prevalent participants for stress research. Those educators, who teach in the middle grades classroom (grades 6-8) have notable stressors in the workplace daily that deserve to be recorded. The voice of middle grades teachers was heard and their top stressors in the classroom were identified so that improvement can begin in terms of alleviating and preventing specific stressors for this unique body of educators. In addition, the relationship of stress to teacher career phase was something that was not found to be as plentiful in previous literature. The researcher, as a previous middle grades educator, believes the opinion of this body of educators to be vastly important, and should be valued by the educational community. Middle school teachers and their perspectives are unique, and their experiences deserve attention and administrators have a responsibility to ensure this group of teachers are provided with the support needed in the stressful environment of a classroom.

The fact that relevant workplace stressors were identified from the focus group provides a new insight into the middle grades educator classroom, though it mirrors research in similar elementary and secondary studies. This group of educators, and their daily challenges are important to report, specifically if greater problems such as job satisfaction and teacher retention are ever to be addressed. This is a starting point. The stressors identified by middle grades educators can begin to be explored so that the potential for alleviating stressors can be explored. As the results of this research indicated, there is no significant extent to which middle grades educator stressors are impacted by teacher career phase. Although no relationship was found, the information regarding middle grades educator stressors, how they could possibly vary for the early career phase teacher as opposed to the current educator, provides insight and adds middle grades educator perspective to the growing body of teacher stress literature. Middle school teachers, your voice has been heard, by sharing your pertinent stressors experienced daily, you have provided insight into an underrepresented area of teacher stress literature. Middle school administrators, hear the voice of your teachers and take responsibility for improving those stressors that are relevant for them because they are the people who are guiding the leaders of tomorrow.

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Appendices
Appendix A
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Informed Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Jessica Morris, a student in the doctor of education program in curriculum and leadership at Columbus State University. Dr. Michael Richardson will be the faculty member supervising the study.

I. Purpose:
The purpose of this project is to provide a deeper understanding of the extent to which there is a relationship between middle grades educator stressors and phases in the career of a teacher.

II. Procedures:
If you agree to be a part of this study, you will be asked to participate in an hour-long focus group in which you are asked questions about your experience as a middle grades educator, the stressors you encounter in this role and also the career phase in which you currently relate. I would also like to record the focus group discussion, with your permission.

III. Possible Risks or Discomforts:
The researcher does not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study.

IV. Potential Benefits:
There are no benefits to the participants in this study.

V. Costs and Compensation:
There is no compensation for the participants in this study.

VI. Confidentiality:
The data collected will be kept private and the researcher will be the only person with access to the information. It will be kept confidentially with a password known only to the researcher.

VII. Withdrawal:
Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time, and your withdrawal will not involve penalty or loss of benefits.

For additional information about this research project, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Jessica Morris at (229) 395-9848 or morris_jessica@columbusstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Columbus State University Institutional Review Board at irb@columbusstate.edu.

I have read this informed consent form. If I had any questions, they have been answered. By signing this form, I agree to participate in this research project.

_____ _____
Signature of Participant   Date

Appendix B
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Informed Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Jessica Morris, a student in the doctor of education program in curriculum and leadership at Columbus State University. Dr. Michael Richardson will be the faculty member supervising the study.

I. Purpose:
The purpose of this project is to provide a deeper understanding of the extent to which there is a relationship between middle grades educator stressors and phases in the career of a teacher.

II. Procedures:
A group of middle grades educators will be asked to participate in a paper-based survey which will take approximately thirty minutes. Participants will be asked to complete the survey about their experience as middle grades educators, the stressors encountered in this professional role and also the current career phase with which they can relate.

III. Possible Risks or Discomforts:
The researcher does not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study.

IV. Potential Benefits:

There are no benefits to the participants in this study.

V. Costs and Compensation:
There is no compensation for the participants in this study.

VI. Confidentiality:
The data collected will be kept private and the researcher will be the only person with access to the information. It will be kept confidentially with a password known only to the researcher.

VII. Withdrawal:
Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time, and your withdrawal will not involve penalty or loss of benefits.

For additional information about this research project, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Jessica Morris at (229) 395-9848 or morris_jessica@columbusstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Columbus State University Institutional Review Board at irb@columbusstate.edu.

I have read this informed consent form. If I had any questions, they have been answered. By signing this form, I agree to participate in this research project.

_____ _____
                    Signature of Participant   Date

Appendix C

To Whom It May Concern (Superintendent of Schools):

I am writing with the intent of requesting permission to conduct a research study in your school district. Currently, I am enrolled as a student in the doctorate of education program in curriculum and leadership at Columbus State University. I am in the process of collecting data for my dissertation study, "To what extent is there a relationship between middle grades educator stressors and phases of the career teacher?"

I was hoping that your school district would allow me to conduct 1) an hour-long focus group and/or 2) distribute surveys to be completed by middle grades teachers from varying backgrounds and experience levels to better understand the stressors which impact middle grades teachers at various stages in their careers. Participant input will be recorded and will remain entirely anonymous and confidential to the researcher's study purposes. The input from active middle grades educators is vital in uncovering the top stressors of middle grades teachers at various stages in their careers.

Your approval to assist me in conducting this study would be greatly appreciated. It would be a pleasure to answer any questions or concerns that you may have. I will follow up with a telephone call or you may contact me at morris_jessica@columbusstate.edu.

Sincerely,

Jessica Morris
Ed.D. Candidate, Columbus State University

Appendix D

To Whom It May Concern (Administrators of Schools):

I am writing with the intent of requesting permission to conduct a research study at your middle school. Currently, I am enrolled as a student in the doctorate of education program in curriculum and leadership at Columbus State University. I am in the process of collecting data for my dissertation study, "To what extent is there a relationship between middle grades educator stressors and phases of the career teacher?"

I was hoping that your school would allow me to conduct 1) an hour-long focus group and/or 2) distribute surveys to be completed by middle grades teachers from varying backgrounds and experience levels to better understand the stressors which impact middle grades teachers at various stages in their careers. Your help would be needed in selecting these participants. Participant input will be recorded and will remain entirely anonymous and confidential to the researcher's study purposes. The input from active middle grades educators is vital in uncovering the top stressors of middle grades teachers at various stages in their careers.

Your approval to assist me in conducting this study would be greatly appreciated. It would be a pleasure to answer any questions or concerns that you may have. I will follow up with a telephone call or you may contact me at morris_jessica@columbusstate.edu

Sincerely,

Jessica Morris
Ed.D. Candidate, Columbus State University

Appendix E

The *Life Cycle of the Career Teacher* (Steffy, 2000) advocacy model is described as a developmental model because it describes a process that is ongoing throughout the career of a teacher. Growth is viewed as a sequential pattern though this model, but it is acknowledged that all individuals move along this continuum at different rates (Steffy, 2000).

Please identify the phase of the *Life Cycle of the Career Teacher* (Steffy, 2000) model which <u>currently</u> resonates with your professional position. Remember, it is based upon where you feel you are on this career phase continuum, not upon how many years of experience you have acquired.

_____
NOVICE
When students first experience student teaching and/or teacher education programs. This is when teachers start to gain the skills necessary to function properly and effectively in a classroom.

_____
APPRENTICE
When teachers begin to have planning, and instructional responsibilities. Typically, this is when the integration of content knowledge and professional practices interact in the second and third years of teaching. Typically, idealistic with creative and growth-oriented goals.

_____

PROFESSIONAL
Student and teachers form mutual respect on which the learning relationship is built. These teachers feel as though they are student advocates, are competent, dependable and solid and form the backbone of the education profession. These teachers view themselves as classroom educators and do not desire to be in administration, they are most happy interacting with students.

_____
EXPERT
This group of teachers anticipates, modifies and adjusts instruction to promote student growth. These are educators who are in tune with the needs, interests and learning styles of students in addition to being in tune with other educators. These teachers reflect and commit to growth, change and honing in on the best ideas of the profession. Without serious obstacles, this can be a phase for the lifetime of a teacher.

_____
DISTINGUISHED
These educators impact educational decisions at the county, city, state and federal levels. This group is consulted by policymakers due to their gift in the profession. These teachers typically are well-known for their state and national awards.

_____
EMERITUS
This marks an achievement filled lifetime in education. These career educators, after retirement would continue to serve in the profession in other roles or pursue new beginnings in education. Though formally retired, their expertise and devotion is revered in a way that is still noteworthy.

Appendix F

Email script

Hello _____,

My name is Jessica Morris and I am currently a doctoral candidate at Columbus State University. I am contacting you in hopes of your participation in my dissertation study entitled To what extent is there a relationship between middle grades educator stressors and phases of the career teacher?

The purpose of the study is to determine if there is a relationship between workplace stressors of middle grades teachers and the career phase of educators. Investigation will take place to discover relevant workplace stressors that middle grades teachers experience, and also how these stressors could vary based on the teacher career phase of the educator participants.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please email me at morris_jessica@columbusstate.edu or you may call (229) 395-9848. In addition, feel free to contact me with any questions regarding the anticipated study.

Your time and consideration is appreciated,

Jessica Morris
Doctoral Candidate
Columbus State University

Appendix G

Qualitative Focus Group Protocol
Jessica Morris

To what extent is there a relationship between middle grades educator
stressors and teacher career stages?

<u>Introductory Protocol</u>:
To better assist in our note-taking, the conversations we will have today will be audio
taped. Please sign the consent form permitting this action. The only persons who will be
authorized to access the tapes will be the researchers on the project after the information
is transcribed.

<u>Introduction</u>:
You have been selected to dialogue with us today because of your experience in the
middle grades classroom. The purpose of this study will be to understand the
phenomenon of stress for middle grades educators at various stages in their careers. This
study is not intended to evaluate or judge your experiences as a middle grades educator,
but rather to learn more about your experience in the middle school classroom in hopes of

understanding the stressors which impact middle grades educators at varying stages in their careers.

<u>Key researcher questions to be asked</u>:
1- What stressors are present in the work-place for middle grades educators?
2- How do middle school educator stressors compare based on the career phase of the teacher?
3- To what extent is there a relationship between middle grades educator stressors and teacher career stages?

<u>Interview Background</u>: "think back" read out-loud, avoid giving examples/suppress personal views, active listening pay attention to quick agreement-lots of text does not mean more important establish safe place, engage the hesitant non-verbal information

What is your current position at this institution? _____
How long have you been in your present position? _____

1. Tell me about your role as a middle grades educator in the classroom.

   Probe: How long have you been in the classroom? Describe/Elaborate on _____?

2. Explain the Phases of the Career Teacher (Appendix D). Which phase do you feel represents your current situation? Please explain why?

3. Tell me about how your role as a middle grades classroom teacher has changed as your experience has accrued.

   Probe: Describe/Elaborate on _____?

4. Tell me about the general components of classroom educator (k-12) stress.

   Probe: Explain why you believe these to be the general components of teacher stress

5. How would you describe the stressors specific to middle grades educators?

   Probe: Describe what you believe makes middle grades educators unique in terms of the stressors that impact them

6. In your experience, what do you think the top stressors are of a middle grades educator?

   Probe: Describe why you feel these are the top stressors specific to middle grades teachers

7. In your experience, think back please detail the most stressful experiences of being a middle grades educator.

   Probe: Tell me about why you think these experiences were so stressful

8. Describe your top stressors as a novice middle school teacher

   Probe: What are some examples of your experiences with stress as a novice middle school teacher?

9. What would you describe as your top stressors as a middle school teacher accumulating years of experience?

   Probe: Describe what has happened over time to aid in your varying stressors?

Other Probing Questions:
What happened?
What happened over time?
Is it working? Why/Why not?
How can barriers be overcome?
How do you know?

Appendix H

Middle Grades Educator Survey

Introduction:

You have been selected to participate in this survey because of your experience in the middle grades classroom. The purpose of this study will be to understand the phenomenon of stress for middle grades educators at various stages in their careers. This study is intended to learn more about your experience in the middle school classroom in hopes of understanding the stressors, which impact middle grades educators at varying stages in their careers. Please sign the provided informed consent. Thank you for your participation!

Key research questions:

1- What stressors are present in the work-place for middle grades educators?

2- How do middle school educator stressors compare based on the career phase of the teacher?

3- To what extent is there a relationship between middle grades educator stressors and teacher career stages?

Please read carefully and complete the following FIVE questions:

1. The *Life Cycle of the Career Teacher* (Steffy, 2000) advocacy model is described as a developmental model because it describes a process that is ongoing thoughout the career of the teacher. Growth is viewed as a sequential pattern of six phases, but it is acknowledged that all individuals move along this continuum at different rates (Steffy, 2000).

   Please identify the phase of the model, the *Life Cycle of the Career Teacher (Steffy, 2000)*, which currently resonates with your professional position. Please pick ONLY ONE. Remember, it is based upon where you feel you are on this career phase continuum, not upon how any years of experience you have acquired.

   ○ NOVICE

   When students first experience student teaching and/or teacher education

   programs. This is when teachers start to gain the skills necessary to function

   properly and effectively in a classroom.

   ○ APPRENTICE

   When teachers begin to have planning and instructional responsibilities.

   Typically, this is when the integration of content knowledge and professional

practices interact in the second and third years of teaching. Usually, these educators are idealistic with creative and growth-oriented goals.

○ PROFESSIONAL

Students and teachers form mutual respect on which the learning relationship is built. These teachers feel as though they are student advocates, are competent, dependable, solid and form the backbone of the education profession. These teachers view themselves as classroom educators and do not desire to be in administration; they are most happy interacting with students.

○ EXPERT

This group of teachers anticipates, modifies and adjusts instruction to promote student growth. These are educators who are in tune with the needs, interests and learning styles of students in addition to being in tune with other educators. These teachers reflect and commit to growth, change and honing in on the best ideas of the profession. Without serious obstacles, this can be a phase for the lifetime of a teacher.

○ DISTINGUISHED

These educators impact educational decisions at the county, city, state and federal levels. This group is consulted by policymakers due to their gift in the profession. These teachers typically are well-known for their state and national awards.

○ EMERITUS

This marks an achievement filled lifetime in education. These career educators, after retirement, would continue to serve in the profession in other roles or pursue new beginnings in education. Though formally retired, their expertise and devotion is revered in a way that is still noteworthy.

2. Based upon your experience, what would you describe as the <u>stressors specific to middle grades educators</u>?

   Please <u>rank</u> the most relevant stressors in a middle grades educator workplace environment from (1) to (7) with <u>(1) being the top stressor</u> for middle grades teachers and (7) begin the least relevant stressor for middle grades educators.

   ○ _____ Parents

   ○ _____ Having to "wear a lot of hats"

   ○ _____ Testing instead of giving students time to discover

   ○ _____ Administration

   ○ _____ Student Behavior

   ○ _____ Pressure on myself to make sure all of the "boxes are checked" properly

   ○ _____ Students are not developmentally ready for many things

3. <u>Currently</u>, please rank the top stressors in your middle grades educator workplace, from (1) to (7) with <u>(1) being the top stressor</u> in your workplace environment and (7) being the least stressful in your workplace.

   ○ _____ Parents

   ○ _____ Having to "wear a lot of hats"

   ○ _____ Testing instead of giving students time to discover

   ○ _____ Administration

   ○ _____ Student Behavior

   ○ _____ Pressure on myself to make sure all of the "boxes are checked" properly

   ○ _____ Students are not developmentally ready for many things

4. Based upon your experience as a middle grades teacher, <u>please rank the top stressors that were present in your early (novice/apprentice) career experience</u> with <u>(1) being the top stressor</u> in your early career teacher workplace environment and (7) being the least stressful in your early career teacher workplace.

- ○ _____ Parents
- ○ _____ Having to "wear a lot of hats"
- ○ _____ Testing instead of giving students time to discover
- ○ _____ Administration
- ○ _____ Student Behavior
- ○ _____ Pressure on myself to make sure all of the "boxes are checked" properly
- ○ _____ Students are not developmentally ready for many things

5. Which statement BEST describes your experience with teacher stress?
   - ○ Stressors vary greatly for teachers depending upon career phase.
   - ○ Stressors vary for teachers depending upon career phase.
   - ○ Stressors are the same for teachers regardless of career phase.
   - ○ Stressors are the same for all teachers, but have become magnified over time.